



# "MISS EVERS BOYS"

by Walter Bernstein

Based on a play by

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INT/EXT. SERIES OF SHOTS - 1932

Under the MAIN TITLE CREDITS, we hear WORK SONGS and see DOCUMENTARY PHOTOS giving a sense of life during the Great Depression in the rural South. We see also MISS EUNICE EVERS working as a nurse.

Near the end of the credits, we begin to hear...

MISS EVERS (V.O.)

"I solemnly pledge myself before God ...  
to pass my life in purity, to practice my  
profession faithfully. To endeavor with  
loyalty to assist the physician in his  
work. To devote myself to the welfare of  
those patients committed to my care."

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1973

The room is crowded with SPECTATORS and PRESS. PHOTOGRAPHERS and TV CAMERAS are in a press box to one side. On a dais sit three SENATORS, listening intently to an older MISS EVERS seated alone at a table before them. She is dressed in her Sunday best and wears a hat and gloves.

Behind her in the first row of spectators sit other WITNESSES; later, we will recognize one of these as an older DR. SAMUEL BRODUS.

MISS EVERS (CONT.)

That's the oath I took, Senator. Just  
like the doctors do. I took an oath, the  
Nurse's oath. You have to understand ...  
nursing was my life.

The CHAIRMAN speaks respectfully to Miss Evers.

CHAIRMAN

We do understand and respect that, Miss  
Evers, and we do appreciate very much  
your testifying before us today. Now, I  
hope you understand that the sole purpose  
of this committee is to discover the  
truth about the Public Health Service  
program commonly called "the Tuskegee  
Study."

MISS EVERS

That's what we all want, Senator.

CHAIRMAN

Good.

(beginning his inquiry)

Now, I understand you worked on the program from the beginning?

MISS EVERS

(proudly)

From the very first in 1932 up until I retired a few years ago, nearly forty years.

CHAIRMAN

(jocular)

That's longer than I've been in the Senate!

There are polite chuckles from the other Senators.

CHAIRMAN

(continuing)

Tell em, Miss Evers, how did you feel about the Study?

MISS EVERS

(wary, defensive)

Our patients got the best doctorin' they ever had in their life.

SECOND SENATOR

But according to the testimony so far, Miss Evers, there are ways in which this Study sounds like some sort of Nazi experiment. It was established at Neuremberg that experimentation without informed--

MISS EVERS

(interrupting)

You did what you could, whatever. It was an epidemic, with all that syphilis goin' around, Senator. Life was always hard in Macon County, but the Depression made it worse. You just have no idea what it was like down there back then.

CHAIRMAN

We've heard a lot of testimony, from some of the patients, from other nurses, and from your supervisor, Dr. Brodus.

At this, Miss Evers turns and exchanges a glance with Brodus. She turns back to the Senators.

MISS EVERS

(strong)

Dr. Brodus is a fine doctor who cared, Senator. I don't care what y'all sayin' about him now... I was honored to serve under that man.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - NIGHT - 1932

The room is dark except for one light over the table. A BLACK YOUTH, about ten, is on the table. His breath comes in great, painful gasps. Bending over him with a stethoscope is BRODUS. Standing behind him is a younger Nurse Evers. Brodus walks away, shaking his head, his face taut and angry.

MISS EVERS

Are you just goin' to let him choke to death?

BRODUS

(bitterly)

Well, what do you suggest, Nurse? We've tried digitalis. We've tried mercurial diarrhetics. Maybe I should just cut him open and drain him?

(then, contrite)

I'm sorry. I don't mean to take it out on you. It was a farming accident, wasn't it?

MISS EVERS

Yes. He was plowing and the mule got away from him; kicked him. Crushed his chest. His heart just won't work. Is that fluid on the pericardium?

BRODUS

We'll have to notify his parents.

(to the patient, angrily)

What made you think, boy, that you were old enough to handle a mule?

He paces around the bed in frustrate rage; the enemy Death is winning. Miss Evers bends over the bed.

MISS EVERS

His bedclothes are wet. I'm going to get new ones.

BRODUS  
(suddenly)  
No. Wait a minute.  
(she looks puzzled)  
Get away from him.

MISS EVERS  
(puzzled, upset)  
What?

BRODUS  
Nurse, I want a syringe with a large bore  
needle.  
(as she hesitates)  
Now! What did I say? Cut him open and  
drain him? Maybe I knew what I was  
talkin' about.

She hurries to get the needle. The patient stirs in pain.  
Brodus talks to him gently.

BRODUS  
(continuing)  
Now, I'm not... I'm not going to hurt  
you, son. Just want to take a look at  
your chest, that's all. Just want to take  
a look.

Miss Evers returns with the needle and hands it to him. He  
works as he talks, testing the needle, swabbing the chest  
with antiseptic. He talks low and gently to the boy.

BRODUS  
(continuing)  
And you take Nurse Evers' hand, and you  
squeeze it tight.

MISS EVERS  
You can't hurt me.

BRODUS  
You don't get much chance to hold onto a  
pretty lady's hand like that, now do you?  
I'm not going to hurt you, son. Am I,  
Nurse?

MISS EVERS  
No, Doctor.

BRODUS  
I'm going to get you out of this, boy.

MISS EVERS

You trust him and you'll be up and around in no time. That's true. I don't want you with that mule no more.

The boy looks at Miss Evers while Brodus surreptitiously retrieves the syringe. Very delicately, he starts working it into the chest cavity. The boy groans and tries to stir, but Miss Evers holds him tightly. Brodus manipulates the needle into the chest cavity and pauses. The patient squeezes Miss Evers' hand hard. She tries to hold him still with her other hand.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

What's that mule's name? What's his name?

Carefully, Brodus pulls the syringe. They wait, holding their breath. Then, fluid begins to appear in it, more and more until the syringe is full. Very slowly, Brodus withdraws the needle. The patient takes a deep breath. Brodus and Miss Evers look at each other. A slow smile spreads over his face. Her look is full of admiration.

MISS EVERS

(continuing; quietly)

Hallelujah

EXT. EVERS' HOUSE - DAY - 1932

Father and Miss Evers are walking back from church. Her father is a stern, unsmiling man, deliberate in his manner. He is not a mean man, but he is a tough one who conceals his caring nature.

MISS EVERS

This morning when the Reverend was talking about miracles, I wanted to say 'I saw one last night performed by a fine doctor.'

FATHER

Now, this Dr. Brodus, is he colored or is he white?

MISS EVERS

Papa, how many times I got to tell you? We don't have white doctors at Tuskegee.

FATHER

Well, the way you been carryin' on, I thought maybe he was white.

MISS EVERS

I wasn't carrying on. I was just being appreciative. He saved that boy's life--

FATHER

Well, what he's supposed to do? He's a doctor, ain't he?

MISS EVERS

You wait on people doing what they supposed to do, and see how long you wait.

FATHER

Well... you always did like savin' people.

MISS EVERS

I didn't save him, Dr. Brodus saved him. I was only doin' my nursin' job.

INT. EVERS' HOUSE - DAY - 1932

They go inside.

FATHER

Don't you be sayin' "only" either. You're a nurse and that's more than just a job. Don't you go makin' light of it.

MISS EVERS

I'm not, Papa--

FATHER

Unless you want to end up cleanin' some white lady's toilets like your mama had to do all of her life?

MISS EVERS

No. I have had my share of that. Ham'll be out in ten minutes.

She goes into the kitchen.

FATHER

We didn't slave to send you to a nursin' school for that kind of life.

MISS EVERS  
No, Papa, you did not.

FATHER  
All right, then.

MISS EVERS  
All right, then.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - BRODUS' OFFICE - DAY - 1932

Brodus is updating a map that says INCIDENCE OF SYPHILIS.  
There is a knock on the door. Miss Evers comes in.

BRODUS  
Come in.

MISS EVERS  
Yes, doctor?

He takes some keys out of his desk drawer.

BRODUS  
Oh, good, Nurse Evers. Are you still  
checked out to drive the District office  
car? I've got a new job for you.

MISS EVERS  
(taking the keys)  
You need me to go somewhere?

BRODUS  
If we hurry we can make it on time.  
There's somebody very important we have  
to pick up at the bus.

EXT. TUSKEGEE BUS STATION - DAY - 1932

A white man in a Public Health Service Uniform is waiting.  
He is in his early thirties, a sober, sincere, rather strait-  
laced young man. His name is DOUGLAS. He starts to drink  
from a fountain marked COLORED, notices the sign, then moves  
to an adjoining fountain marked WHITES ONLY. He is aware of  
the black men nearby watching him.

Miss Evers and Brodus drive up. Brodus gets out to greet  
him, Miss Evers holding back in the car.



BRODUS  
(effusive)  
Dr. Douglas! I'm sorry we're late. I hope  
you had a pleasant trip.

DOUGLAS  
Yes, I did.

BRODUS  
Welcome to Tuskegee!

DOUGLAS  
How are you?

BRODUS  
Fine. It's sure a pleasure seeing you  
again. You have bags?

DOUGLAS  
Oh, yes. Here.

BRODUS  
Let me give you a hand?

DOUGLAS  
Sure.

Brodus takes his bag and opens the car door.

BRODUS  
Oh. I forgot my manners. Dr. Douglas,  
Nurse Evers.

MISS EVERS  
How do.

DOUGLAS  
(friendly)  
It's a pleasure.

MISS EVERS  
Yes, sir.

She takes his offered hand. They get in the car, and Evers  
pulls out.

BRODUS  
Dr. Douglas, I think you're going to find  
that Nurse Evers will be a tremendous help  
to you.

DOUGLAS

Well... we will need all the help we can get. And luckily, we've got all the funding we need from a foundation in Chicago. Everyone's aware of what a plague syphilis has become, and we're determined to stamp this thing out!

EXT. TUSKEGEE STREET - DAY - 1932

Miss Evers drives the District official car.

BRODUS

But this program is just for the negroes in Macon County?

DOUGLAS

Yes, and that's why Tuskegee was chosen. It's one of the few all-negro hospitals in the South, in a county that's almost 80% colored. Now, you may not know this, but you people have of the highest concentrations of syphilis in the country, it's nearly thirty-five percent.

BRODUS

Oh, we know it, Doctor. I mean, our wards are filled with syphilis because the white hospitals won't let them in. Negroes also have more pellagra, pneumonia, and TB, but there is no statistical basis for the belief that syphilis is a Negro disease any more than it was a French disease in the last century, or Russian or Polish before that.

DOUGLAS

Don't get me wrong, Doctor. I'm not one of those who believes that Negroes are inherently more susceptible because of some... I mean, I voted for Roosevelt.

EXT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - 1932

They pull up and get out, moving toward the front door.

DOUGLAS

We'll have to test them first of course, give them Wassermans to make sure.  
(more)

DOUGLAS (cont'd)  
(to Brodus about bag)  
I'll take that, Doctor.

BRODUS  
That in itself will be a huge undertaking.

DOUGLAS  
Great pains for great rewards, right?

BRODUS  
You don't intend on telling them they  
have syphilis, do you?

DOUGLAS  
Well, if they have it, we'll have to tell  
them something, won't we?

MISS EVERS  
Well, maybe we better not use a word they  
never heard before. That'll just scare  
them off, Doctor.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY - 1932

BRODUS  
So what are we supposed to tell them?

MISS EVERS  
Well, we can just tell them there's  
something the matter with their blood.  
(they turn to her)  
You don't have to say exactly, they all  
know about bad blood.

BRODUS  
She's right.

MISS EVERS  
That's what they call anything that's the  
matter with them.

BRODUS  
The main thing is to make them understand  
we only want to get them well.

DOUGLAS  
And indeed we do. I do, you do... and  
the government does. We're going to find  
a cure for this terrible disease. We're  
going to stop at nothing less.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - WARD - NURSES' STATION - DAY - 1932  
as Miss Evers is emptying out her desk while Betty watches.

BETTY  
They're doing this for the Negro?  
(shakes her head)  
Got to be a hoodwink in there someplace.

MISS EVERS  
Don't go always looking to find the  
underside, girl.

BETTY  
But I'm always finding it.

MISS EVERS  
These men are going to be treated for a  
very bad disease. That's more than  
anybody else has ever done for them, so  
don't you go makin' a mockery out of it,  
Betty Parsons. Now, you're taking my  
place here on the ward, so you hop to it.  
Keep your eye on old Mr. Blakely... you  
think he's taking his medicine, but he's  
hiding his pills under his tongue. And  
that new man who come in, check him for  
a fever every two hours and make sure it  
don't go spiking on you.

(stops, shakes her head)  
Just listen to me giving you advice. Come  
here, gal. You're going to do just fine.  
Well now, don't go getting too many ideas  
of your own self. Listen to the doctors  
'cause they know. You hear?

BETTY  
I hear. You sure look good in your new  
uniform, Eunice. Like you was born to it.

MISS EVERS  
It's going to be a great thing.

BETTY  
Good luck.

MISS EVERS  
I'll see you.

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1972

Miss Evers is continuing her testimony.

MISS EVERS

It was a great thing. The Government had never done nothin' like that for us before. It was the dawn of a new day, and I was the one they had chose to spread the word.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY - 1932

Miss Evers drives along in the official car. As she drives, she rehearses what she will say.

MISS EVERS

I have been sent... I have been sent... I have been sent here by the government, the United States government, yes I have, up there in Washington.

EXT. CLUSTER OF SHACKS - DAY - 1932

Miss Evers stands outside speaking to a group of families, continuing her speech.

MISS EVERS

And the government is sending us the best medicine to treat anybody in this county who needs it. When did that ever happen? Something good is starting up for a change, something new, and this time we're all going to be part of it. You have not seen the health you're going to see in Macon County, Alabama! You all going to come and see me? When you get there, you will see me, don't worry.

The crowd looks dubious. She picks out a mother and baby.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

You goin' to see me, sister? You goin' to bring that big pretty baby with you? You goin' to come to Nurse Evers?

(to the baby)

Yes, that baby's goin' to come...

EXT. PLANTATION FIELD - DAY - 1932

Extensive cotton fields can be seen in the background, men, women and children picking the cotton. Miss Evers is talking to a wealthy white man.

MISS EVERS

The way the government was thinking, Mr. Kirk, sir, is that you might have field hands who don't even know they got bad blood. They just feel sickly a lot of the time. And that, sir, is not good for your cotton business. Stands to reason a sickly field hand ain't gonna pick nearly about as much cotton as a healthy one. So we get them better, and then, it's not just helping them, it's helping you. Which is my concern too, 'cause we're here for the whole community.

EXT. FIELD - DAY - 1932

Miss Evers is talking to a group of field hands.

MISS EVERS

Yes, ma'am, even if you're dirt poor and you ain't got a dime to your name, if you ain't seen a doctor in your whole life ... if you got bad blood, you get treated for free. Now ain't that something? I'm asking you, ain't that something for a government to be doing? And for the colored? Oh, we got us a whole New Deal here. Now who comin' to see me? Raise up your hand. Who comin' to see me?

The crowd remains impassive.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - LATE DAY - 1932

Miss Evers drives up and parks and gets out. A few of Mr. Kirks' field hands are lounging about. She greets them.

MISS EVERS

Morning. You all done bring your friends?  
I'm happy to see you. I'm Nurse Evers.

SOUNDS of MUSIC are coming from inside.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - LATE DAY - 1932

As she comes in and stands at the rear, she sees WILLIE, BEN and HODMAN. Ben plays a mouth organ while Willie tries out some dance steps. They do not notice Miss Evers, but then Willie executes a difficult maneuver and she applauds.

MISS EVERS  
Lord, that was truly fine! The way you was turnin' and twistin'... that was the mark of a born dancer. Excuse me. I'm Nurse Evers, the person you're here to meet. Thank you for comin'.

BEN  
We here on account of Mr. Kirk. He told us we better.

HODMAN  
He send you, too?

MISS EVERS  
(shakes her head)  
No white man sent me. A colored man, a fine, important colored man, Dr. Samuel J. Brodus, up at Tuskegee. To offer you all some free doctorin'.

WILLIE  
Free, huh?

HODMAN  
You say free?

MISS EVERS  
Yes. Doctorin' as fine and free as any you can get anywhere.

BEN  
Yeah, but see, we ain't sick.

HODMAN  
That's right.

WILLIE  
You think anybody sick could dance like this?

Willie does a few intricate steps.

MISS EVERS

Well, that's a mighty fine movement, but that still don't mean you ain't got bad blood.

HODMAN

How you know we got bad blood?

MISS EVERS

Well, that's what we goin' to find out, ain't it?

She looks at the classroom seats and smiles to herself as she walks to a certain seat in the front row and stands looking down at it. The men look at her curiously.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

Been a long time since I sat here.

WILLIE

This where you did your schoolin'?

MISS EVERS

(nods)

Hmhmm. I sat right smack dab in front of Miss Teeters. Look.

She points to the desk. Initials have been cut into it, and among them is E.E.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

She didn't like us doin' that, but everybody did. You just had to be careful not to get caught. Now.

She sits and takes out a pad and pencil and points to Willie, all business.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

You, sir. Your name.

HODMAN

Wait, hold on. Why the government helpin' us all of a sudden? What? They got a war comin', they gonna need us?



MISS EVERS

They have a whole new view of things. A kind of people point of view. And it's comin' straight down from President Roosevelt.

WILLIE

Well, I ain't scared to give my name. My name is Willie Johnson. W-I-L-L-E. Johnson.

MISS EVERS

Willie Johnson.  
(to Hodman)  
Yes?

HODMAN

Hodman.

MISS EVERS

Hodman?

HODMAN

Hodman Bryan.

She looks at Ben.

BEN

Well... I'm Ben. I'm Big Ben Washington.

MISS EVERS

Big Ben Washington.

WILLIE

You see, we a group. The four of us. You lookin' at the next winners of the Macon County Victrola Gillee competition right here.

MEN

That's right.

BEN

Just 'cause I give my name, that don't mean I'm comin' back for no treatment.

Miss Evers thinks, then her face lights up.

MISS EVERS

I just had me an idea. I know how I can get the government to take you out to that competition.

WILLIE  
How you goin' to do that?

MISS EVERS  
I'll drive you there in my government car.  
After we stop off at the hospital and you  
get your free tests and your free hot  
lunches.

HODMAN  
Free lunch?

MISS EVERS  
Yep. We've got to fatten you up for the  
kill.

They look at her, unsure whether she's joking. She keeps a  
straight face and then laughs. They laugh back, relieved.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
I got ya! Now. You all said four of you  
in this here group. Where's the fourth?

BEN  
He ain't comin'.

WILLIE  
See, he don't believe anythin' Mr. Kirk  
say could be good for anyone colored.

MISS EVERS  
He work for Mr. Kirk?

BEN  
No, he don't work for Mr. Kirk. Caleb, he  
works for hisself.

MISS EVERS  
Well, this ain't got nothin' to do with  
Mr. Kirk. You dealin' here with the  
government, right here.  
(prepares to write)  
Caleb--?

WILLIE  
Humphries. Caleb Humphries.

Miss Evers starts to write the name, then stops.

MISS EVERS  
Caleb Humphries... Caleb Humphries!

She turns and looks down at the seat directly behind her.  
She points to the name CALEB scratched onto the desk.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
Sat right behind me.

HODMAN  
You joshin' now.

MISS EVERS  
(shakes her head)  
I will never forget that boy as long as  
I live. He made me so miserable ...  
pullin' on my hair, and stickin' my  
pigtails in the ink well. Nobody could  
do nothin' with him.

BEN  
(nods)  
Sounds just like Caleb, all right.

WILLIE  
It does sound like Caleb.

MISS EVERS  
And he won't come for treatment.

WILLIE  
Not Caleb.

MISS EVERS  
Well. I been waitin' twenty years to put  
some size on that boy.

EXT. CALEB'S FARM - DAY - 1932

As Miss Evers strides across to where a man is working on a  
derelict truck. The man - CALEB - pays no attention to her.  
Miss Evers stands before him until he looks at her. She  
smiles at him - and then slaps him hard across the face.

MISS EVERS  
There. That don't exactly make us even,  
but it's somethin'.  
(holds out her hand)  
Eunice Evers. And don't say you don't  
remember me.

He stares at her, rubbing his cheek.

CALEB  
Eunice Evers. I remember. You were the  
smart one.

MISS EVERS  
Remember what you used to do to me?

CALEB  
(shrugs)  
You was a girl.

MISS EVERS  
That ain't no good reason. You still  
ought to be ashamed.

Caleb calls to two boys playing nearby.

CALEB  
Excuse me. Hey! Hey! Come here.

The boys come over. Caleb gives one a sack.

CALEB  
(continuing)  
Carry this feed out to yer mamma out  
yonder.  
(calling to the woman)  
Corina! Corina! We got company!

MISS EVERS  
You have a fine looking family.

CALEB  
Oh. My brother's wife's kids. I'm just  
livin' here helpin' out.

He offers her a drink of water, which she takes.

MISS EVERS  
What's this about you not comin' for  
treatment?

CALEB  
Don't trust no government.

MISS EVERS  
As far as this doctorin' is concerned,  
I'm the government. What you got to say  
about that? You trust me or you still  
want to pull my hair?

He looks at her a moment, then grins.

CALEB

Both.

EXT. ROAD TO TOWN - DAY - 1932

Miss Evers drives along in her car, the four men crammed in, singing.

THE MEN

(singing)

I'm goin' up north/Satisfied/I won't take  
you/Satisfied/Gonna take my  
mule/Satisfied/'Cause he can gilly  
too/Satisfied./Gonna find me a  
gal/Satisfied/Sweet as mountain  
dew/Satisfied/Gonna jump that  
broom/Satisfied/And make her belly  
full/Satisfied./I'm goin' up  
north/Satisfied/I won't take you  
/Satisfied/Gonna take my mule...

Over this, we hear...

MISS EVERS (V.O.)

They came in with me...

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1972

She is continuing.

MISS EVERS

And so did the other ones I talked to...

EXT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - FRONT - DAY - 1932

A long line of men leads to the front door. A FARM TRUCK pulls up and disgorges more men who join the line.

MISS EVERS (V.O.)

...And the ones they talked to. Did they come! On foot, in the owners' trucks, any way they could, they came in for treatment, sorely needed treatment...

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY - 1932

The line continues inside, among them the dance group. Douglas and Brodus survey the line.

BRODUS  
Good morning!

MEN  
Mornin'.

DOUGLAS  
(to Brodus, touched)  
My God, there's so many... I had no idea.

BRODUS  
Welcome to Macon County, Doctor.

DOUGLAS  
Well, we'd better start another line.  
There's a lot of men here in need of  
care.

BRODUS  
(to the men)  
If I can have all the young men down on  
this end, please file into this room and  
form two new lines. Thank you.  
(to the dance group)  
All right, and you men will be next.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - DAY - 1932

Douglas takes one group into one treatment room, Brodus  
another. The line is moving forward to where Miss Evers  
waits to take their blood. Evers smiles and comforts each as  
she gently administers the needle. An ASSISTANT NURSE moves  
between the groups, collecting samples.

MISS EVERS  
How's that son of yours, Sam? He still  
got the croup?

MAN #1  
That stuff you give him (ouch) did the  
trick, Miss Evers.

MISS EVERS  
We're gonna get everybody in Macon County  
well, you'll see. Next group!

The dance group comes in. Hodman pushes Caleb to the front.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
Caleb?

CALEB

Ma'am. I see you gettin' even with me for pullin' your hair, huh?

MISS EVERS

You're not gettin' off that easy, but give me your finger.

(jabs him hard)

All right, hold it up. Hodman?

Hodman is next in line. He draws back when he gets to Miss Evers.

HODMAN

No, no, Miss Evers, I don't wanna get my blood took. I have a wife... I got a wife, I'm still young, I got... I got obligations.

MISS EVERS

Obligations?

HODMAN

You know, to my wife. Family obligations. So I just can't have my blood took.

MISS EVERS

You know Fred Milson down by Alma?

HODMAN

Works in the sawmill?

MISS EVERS

(nods)

He got seven going on eight children. He been givin' his blood for six years and his obligations is doin' just fine.

HODMAN

Well, I sure hope you right, Miss Evers, 'cause--

MISS EVERS

I am and wouldn't say it if it wasn't so.

DOUGLAS steps out of his examing room with a group of questioning men.

DOUGLAS

Could you step out here for a second?

(to Brodus)

Doctor? Excuse me, I'd like to speak with the men?

BRODUS

Sure, go right ahead.

DOUGLAS

Gentlemen, there seems to be some confusion. Let me explain what we we're checking for. There's a germ that infects the genital area resulting in a temporary and painless, but highly contagious penile ulceration. Now, this ulceration will disappear as the disease becomes non-contagious or latent. This latency can last for up to thirty years until, finally, the cardiovascular and nervous systems will disintegrate and collapse. Are there any questions?

He pauses. The men just stare at him. Miss Evers whispers to him.

MISS EVERS

Doctor, can I just say something?

DOUGLAS

Sure.

She firmly addresses the men.

MISS EVERS

By frolickin' too much, or maybe passed on from your mama or your daddy, you might get a really bad sore down below on your private parts, then through that sore, a bug can crawl up inside you and go to sleep for twenty or thirty years so's not to hurt anybody but you. But when it wakes up, you can't walk, you can't breathe, you can't think. That is bad blood. That's what we're checking to see if you all got so we can get rid of it.

(to the previous man)

You done, come on. Willie?

The men nod, getting it now. Miss Evers turns away, but Douglas calls to her.



DOUGLAS

Nurse, can I speak with you for a second?

MISS EVERS

Sure.

(they move aside)

Yes, doctor?

DOUGLAS

Thank you.

(ruefully)

I know I'm a good medical doctor. But I'm not so sure I'm a good people doctor yet.

MISS EVERS

Doctor Douglas, you're helping people. You're a good people doctor.

EXT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - EVENING - 1932

Miss Evers comes out and starts for her car. Leaning against it is Caleb.

MISS EVERS

Evening, Caleb.

CALEB

Evenin', Eunice. I see you a long day.

MISS EVERS

World's full of sickness.

(he helps her)

Thanks.

He nods. There is a pause.

CALEB

Look, I ain't accustomed to askin' favors, but I was...

MISS EVERS

(smiles)

Well, you ain't used to seeing me again neither, but here we are.

CALEB

I was wonderin, could you get hold to a book, medicine book, tells you about that bug.

MISS EVERS

Oh, the doctors'll answer any questions that you have.

CALEB

I know, but I'd rather read up on it for myself.

MISS EVERS

It's just those books are so technical.

CALEB

You think I won't understand it?

MISS EVERS

(pauses, then)

I'll see what's in the library.

(as he turns to go)

Caleb. What'd you quit school for? You were the smartest one in the class. I was just the pushiest. You used to drive Miss Teeters crazy asking questions all the time, and then all of a sudden you wasn't there.

CALEB

I'd appreciate it if you get hold of that book for me.

He strides off. She watches him go.

EXT. CONTEST BARN - NIGHT - 1932

By the light of lanterns and car headlights, a crowd is watching a dance contest, Miss Evers among them. A pair of dancers finish a number to loud applause. They are really very good. Willie, Hodman, Ben and Caleb are watching this, waiting to go on. They are nervous

WILLIE

Them old boys is pretty good.

BEN

Yeah, but ain't as good as you, Willie, and you know they ain't.

WILLIE

I dunno about that. See the way that boy was doin' that sand slide?

HODMAN

I seen you do that step in your sleep.

WILLIE

Yeah, only thing is, now I'm wide awake.

CALEB

Come on, Willie, you gotta think positive now. We gonna win this thing.

HODMAN

That's right. 'Cause we the best!

CALEB

There ain't no doubt about that, Willie.

HODMAN

You tell that man to say our new name?

CALEB

You know I told him to say the name.

HODMAN

He better not forget. That name gonna be our good luck charm.

CALEB

Oh, names don't give you no luck, neither do charms.

HODMAN

What you know about charms?

CALEB

I know enough not to mess with 'em.

BEN

Hey, everybody, listen up.

They brace themselves as the Announcer calls out.

ANNOUNCER

And now ... from Macon County ... a group we all been hearing a lot of good things about ...

He consults a piece of paper.

ANNOUNCER

(continuing)

"Miss Evers' Boys!"

ON MISS EVERS. Her eyes widen with delight and surprise. This is the first time she'd heard this and she is very moved.

The group trots out on to the stage. Willie goes into his dance, the others playing behind him. The audience loves them. When they finish, the applause is thunderous. Miss Evers is on her feet with everyone else, clapping and cheering, wiping the tears from her eyes.

EXT. ROAD TO TOWN - NIGHT - 1932

Miss Evers drives in her car along with the group. Willie balances a Victrola on his lap. They are all elated with their victory.

BEN

I look to Caleb, I say 'what was that?'  
you did there?

WILLIE

You mean when I went up in the air? Oh,  
that was a... that was a jack spring.

BEN

You sure did get everybody's attention.

HODMAN

You sure did.

CALEB

Yes, sir.

MISS EVERS

You got mine.

WILLIE

(pats the Victrola)  
I'll tell you the truth, I can't believe  
we won the victrola. You know, I ain't  
never won nothing my whole life. This has  
sure has been some night.

MISS EVERS

First of many, Willie.

WILLIE

You right, Miss Evers. Right from here  
right on up to the Cotton Club in Harlem,  
New York, U.S.A.! That's what I'm talkin'  
about.

CALEB  
 (to Eunice)  
 Willie got aspirations.

MISS EVERS  
 What's wrong with that. Don't you?

BEN  
 (chuckles)  
 Oh, Miss Evers, now youo know Caleb  
 wouldn't tell you if he had.

HODMAN  
 Caleb wouldn't tell his own mother he  
 been borned.

MISS EVERS  
 Guess he figured she'd find out, sooner  
 or later.

They all laugh. Hodman points to some shacks along the road.

HODMAN  
 There's our houses right over there, Miss  
 Evers.

EXT. WILLIE'S FOLKS' SHACK - NIGHT - 1932

As Miss Evers stops the car there is thunder.

WILLIE  
 (getting out)  
 Wait'll everybody sees us comin' in a  
 government car! I wanna tell you  
 somethin'. This time the Victrola, next  
 time, the record!

CALEB  
 That's right!

HODMAN  
 I like that!  
 (calling to his house)  
 Hey, Maizie, you and the children come  
 out here, look at this!

MISS EVERS  
 (as the three move off)  
 Hodman, Ben, Willie.  
 (they pause)  
 "Miss Evers' Boys".

HODMAN

That's us.

MISS EVERS

I just want you to know that... naming  
your group after me--

BEN

We knew it would bring us luck, Miss  
Evers.

MISS EVERS

Well, I have never had such an honor. And  
I just want to thank you.

There is an embarrassed silence, then Willie leaps in the  
air and does a dance step.

WILLIE

First of many!

They say good night and go off. She starts the car and  
drives along with Caleb as the rain begins in earnest.

EXT. ROAD TO TOWN - NIGHT - 1932

MISS EVERS

That Willie, he's very good, he really  
could get to the Cotton Club if he wanted  
to.

CALEB

That book you give me ...

MISS EVERS

Yes?

CALEB

I had them symptoms once, and you all  
give me that test to make sure about it...

MISS EVERS

The Wasserman test.

CALEB

And that test'll tell you whether you got  
it or you don't.

MISS EVERS

That's right.

CALEB

Well, do I or don't I?

MISS EVERS

Caleb, the doctors--

CALEB

I'm askin' you though now.

MISS EVERS

(after a moment)

Yeah, you have it. So do the rest of the men. Hodman, Ben, Willie... so do most of the men that came in. But syphilis is treatable, there's Salvarson treatment, there's the mercury rubs-

CALEB

That'll cure it?

MISS EVERS

(carefully)

It's not a hundred percent ... and there's some side effects ... but there's a chance.

CALEB

What kind of chance?

EXT. CALEB'S FARM - NIGHT - 1932

She pulls up.

MISS EVERS

Caleb, you're fine, Caleb, you really are. And we're going to make all you all even finer. There's a whole lot more competitions to win. But ... you won't tell them, will you? I mean, what they got? All they know is they got bad blood and we don't want to scare them.

CALEB

You tellin' me, I got a right to know, why don't they got a right to know?

MISS EVERS

Well, I made an exception for you. It was un-professional of me. But what's done is done. But we don't want to scare the other men.

CALEB  
 (dryly)  
 They ain't children, they colored.

MISS EVERS  
 Please, Caleb, the doctors know what  
 they're doing and they think it's for the  
 best.

CALEB  
 You think that, too?

MISS EVERS  
 Of course I do.  
 (exasperated)  
 Yes! Why you always trying to fluster me?  
 You ain't changed a bit, have you?

She glares at him. After a moment, he nods.

CALEB  
 All right. I'll keep my mouth shut.  
 (after a moment)  
 You ain't changed a bit, neither.

He goes into the house. She watches him go.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - DAY - 1932

MONTHS LATER. CLOSE on the Victrola. It is playing a MUSICAL  
 NUMBER on a scratchy record. The CAMERA PULLS BACK to show  
 a circle of men stripped to the waist. They are massaging  
 each other's backs to the beat of the music, led by Willie,  
 who also cannot help doing a little dance at the same time.  
 Miss Evers walks around the circle with a large jar out of  
 which the men take handfuls of mercury salve for the rubs.  
 Everyone seems to be enjoying himself.

MISS EVERS  
 Rub hard now ... hard as you can. Rub  
 hard now! Squeeze that mercury into those  
 muscles until they holler--

MEN  
 Squeeze!

MISS EVERS  
 I can't even hear you.

MEN  
 Squeeze!!!



MISS EVERS

That is the puniest squeeze I ever heard!

MEN

(a roar)

Please!!!!

MISS EVERS

That's better. The harder you rub, the quicker bad blood becomes hot blood.

She goes to get more salve. Willie notices Douglas watching his dance and grins at him.

WILLIE

I bet you ain't never seen no dance step like that before.

DOUGLAS

Actually, I have seen something similar.

WILLIE

(sceptical)

Where?

DOUGLAS

Harlem. The Cotton Club.

WILLIE

Oh, man, you lyin', you ain't been to the Cotton Club.

DOUGLAS

No, I'm not.

WILLIE

(testing him)

Okay, who you seen dance there?

DOUGLAS

Well, I seen Buck and Bubbles, and... snake lips...

WILLIE

(coming forward)

Snake Hips Tucker?

DOUGLAS

Yeah. Snake Hips Tucker.

WILLIE

Hey man, did you see Ruby Blue?

DOUGLAS

Ruby Blue? I don't think so--

WILLIE

He don't think so? If you seen Ruby Blue, you wouldn't think so, you'd know so! Oh, man, he be scatterin' and leapin'... Hey, he's the best.

Willie demonstrates as he gets back in line.

DOUGLAS

Well, I guess I'm just going to have to go back there someday and see him.

WILLIE

I guess you will!

(calls)

Hey, Miss Evers!

She comes in. He indicates Douglas, who has just risen in his opinion.

WILLIE

(continuing)

You know what this man says? He say he been to the Cotton Club.

MISS EVERS

Well, he can't stay ignorant all his life.

The men all laugh.

MISS EVERS

(continuing; to Douglas)

Well, good for you.

DOUGLAS

I wasn't lying. I was actually there.

EXT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - EVENING - 1932

as Miss Evers comes out and goes to the car. And once again Caleb is leaning against it. She stops and looks at him.

MISS EVERS

Caleb, I don't know any more books on the matter.

CALEB

Oh, I don't need no more.

There is a pause. She waits.

CALEB  
(continuing)  
You wouldn't... go out with anybody got  
what I got, would you?

MISS EVERS  
You mean, go out like--

CALEB  
Like to a picture show or somethin' to  
eat. Somethin' like that. You wouldn't do  
that, would you?

MISS EVERS  
No. I wouldn't go with anybody...

CALEB  
Yeah. That's what I figgered.

MISS EVERS  
I'd go with you.

He looks at her. She nods.

INT. THE EVERS' HOUSE - EVENING - 1932

Miss Evers stands before a mirror, trying on a hat. Her  
father looks at her sourly. She is unperturbed, having heard  
this argument before.

FATHER  
I don't want you steppin' out with no  
field hand. You're a professional woman,  
a nurse--

MISS EVERS  
You don't see any doctors asking me out.  
Or lawyers, for that matter, or  
undertakers. And he's not just a field  
hand. He's-- Why am I making excuses?

FATHER  
I been tryin' to tell you all your life,  
you got to set your sights high. Uphold  
the dignity of this family.

There is a knock on the door. Miss Evers turns, relieved.

MISS EVERS

Got a good sense of timing, too.

She opens the door. Caleb stands there, dressed in a clean and pressed pair of overalls.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

Caleb.

CALEB

Evenin', Eunice.

MISS EVERS

Come on in.

CALEB

I got my truck waitin...

MISS EVERS

Come on, it ain't gonna run off. I want you to meet my Papa. Papa, this is Caleb Humphries. Caleb, Mr. Evers.

CALEB

Good evenin', sir.

FATHER

Howdy.

Caleb holds out his hand. Mr. Evers shakes it reluctantly.

MISS EVERS

He sat right behind me in Miss Teeter's class, and pulled my hair.

She kisses her father on the cheek and whispers.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

Well, you've seen the worst. Don't go brooding on it.

She goes out, followed by Caleb.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT - 1932

as Caleb drives them in his old, battered pickup which runs badly.

MISS EVERS (V.O.)  
Caleb, are you sure this thing'll make it?

CALEB (V.O.)  
Hush, now... she don't take kindly to  
disrespect.

EXT. BARBECUE STAND - NIGHT - 1932

Caleb and Miss Evers approach a table.

MISS EVERS  
You said there was a juke joint out here.

CALEB  
Well, they have the liquor and all that  
carryin' on on Saturday.

They sit at a table eating drippy barbecue sandwiches. She  
tries valiantly to keep hers from dripping on her dress.

MISS EVERS  
Oh. Good barbecue.

CALEB  
I bet you my momma made better

MISS EVERS  
(smiles)  
Everybody's momma made better.

CALEB  
I remember me and my brother, we had the  
job of ladlin' out the sauce. You know.  
It sure was good, my mamma's barbecue.

He takes a big bite. They both smile. The ice has been  
broken; they are beginning to open up to each other.

MISS EVERS  
I always wished I'd had a brother. Or  
even a sister. My momma couldn't have any  
more children after me. Was that the only  
brother you had?

CALEB  
Yeah, he's... He's dead.

MISS EVERS  
Oh. I'm sorry. I... I just thought maybe  
with what you got and all... it was...

CALEB

Oh, you want to know what he died of.  
Well, he didn't have what I have... Well,  
he didn't have no disease.

MISS EVERS

(sympathetic)

An accident?

CALEB

He got himself lynched.

MISS EVERS

Oh, God.

CALEB

He had a big mouth ... like me.

MISS EVERS

I'm sorry, I didn't connect the name--

CALEB

Well, ain't no reason for you to do that  
now, I mean, there's plenty of Humphries  
around here. Hey, look, I didn't mean to  
spoil your evenin' out, got you drippin'  
all over your good dress.

He takes a napkin and carefully wipes a spot from her dress.

MISS EVERS

You forget the dress.

CALEB

You know, what's funny is, I was fixin'  
to leave here when it happened.

MISS EVERS

For where?

CALEB

(shrugs)

Anywhere, U.S.A. Ride the rails, Chicago,  
you know, see what's up North or out  
west, California.

MISS EVERS

You think it'd be any different?

CALEB

It sure can't be the same.

MISS EVERS

I dream on that sometimes... goin' on up  
to New York City and see the sights ...  
don't have to get off the sidewalk when  
a white person come along.

CALEB

Well, why don't you?

MISS EVERS

(simply)

I love what I'm doing here. The  
treatment, the program, knowing I'm doing  
good--

CALEB

-- with us sinners.

MISS EVERS

The disease is the sin, Caleb. Not the  
people, the disease.

CALEB

(grins)

And you're smotin' it fore and aft.

She raises her arms in celebration, which causes the  
sandwich to drip heavily on her dress.

MISS EVERS

Lord help me! You think the Lord don't  
want me to wear this dress?

CALEB

I reckon' not.

EXT. THE EVERS' HOUSE - NIGHT - 1932

Caleb's truck pulls up, steaming.

MISS EVERS

Is it okay?

CALEB

Oh, she'll be all right.

They sit for a moment.

CALEB

(continuing)

After my brother... well, it's why I had to leave school, take his place, start workin'.

MISS EVERS

You were just a child.

(he shrugs)

You could've kept up at home, smart as you were--

CALEB

You ever try pickin' cotton all day and studyin' at night? I tried. Kept fallin' asleep.

MISS EVERS

Everybody can't be John Henry.

Their faces are close. He leans forward to kiss her, then instinctively pulls back.

MISS EVERS

(continuing; gently)

You got no reason to hold back ... you're fine. Come.

She kisses him, holds the kiss, then quickly gets out of the car and goes to her house. She turns and waves to him from the door, then goes inside.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - BRODUS' OFFICE - DAY - 1932

Douglas stands at Brodus' desk.

DOUGLAS

Sam, I've got some bad news. The program is being cancelled.

BRODUS

Cancelled?

DOUGLAS

We've run out of money.

BRODUS

What? The foundation in Chicago...



DOUGLAS

Lost most of its assets in the Crash.  
They've given us all they can.

BRODUS

What about the Public Health Service? The program was their idea in the first place. "Stamp out syphilis" you said.

DOUGLAS

We're treating 1,400 patients, that's 40 injections a year for each man. There's just too much disease for the budget. The idea was to use the funding to get the program started and then turn it over to the states. But the states don't have any money.

BRODUS

(ruefully)

Who was it that said the poor aren't affected by Wall Street?

DOUGLAS

Sam, I'm in touch with Washington. We all want to see if we can salvage this. I mean, the data we've collected this last year alone is worth its weight in gold.

BRODUS

I'm not interested in data, I'm interested in treatment.

DOUGLAS

Think of what it can mean for your race, for the advancement of science!

BRODUS

The loss here is in lives, Doctor.

DOUGLAS

I understand that. Look, just get me some time, okay? Cut staff to the bare bone, divert funds from other departments, whatever you have to do. At least buy us a few more months.

Brodus takes a deep breath.

BRODUS

And then what will I do?

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY - 1932

Miss Evers is pushing a senile old man with advanced syphilis in a wheelchair. Brodus is walking beside her.

MISS EVERS  
These men are suffering. They need treatment.

BRODUS  
I know.

MISS EVERS  
Well, we can't just stop it like that...

BRODUS  
We have no choice

MISS EVERS  
(trying to keep her voice down)  
Doctor, they trust us!

BRODUS  
Nurse Evers, you've done a wonderful job.  
But I have to take you off the program.

She looks at him, uncomprehending.

BRODUS  
(continuing)  
We have to use what little money we have for treatment, cut back in all departments. It's either staff or medicine.

MISS EVERS  
(slowly)  
I understand. Yes. Of course.

BRODUS  
Now, you can go back to the ward.

MISS EVERS  
Betty Parson's working there now.

BRODUS  
Well, you have seniority.

MISS EVERS  
Oh, no, I wouldn't do that...

BRODUS

I hope, I pray that this is just temporary, that I'll be calling you back soon.

MISS EVERS

I know you'll do the best you can.

She pushes the old man toward the ward. Brodus watches her go with profound sadness

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

Oh, Mr. Williams, not that you know I'm even here, let's not be late for catfish night.

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1972

MISS EVERS

Six months passed with no word. There were fewer and fewer treatments, and pretty soon, none at all. I tried to see them when I could, but I had to take a job, the only one I could find, working as a domestic, just like my mother...

EXT. LARGE HOUSE - DAY - 1933

FOUR WHITE LADIES are playing bridge as Miss Evers serves them. None of the women pays any attention to her.

EXT. LARGE HOUSE - EVENING - 1933

as she comes out, wearing a coat over her uniform. Waiting for her is Caleb. They kiss in greeting.

CALEB

You had your supper?

MISS EVERS

I had their supper. Them folks waste more food than the law allows. You could feed the whole county. How're they doing?

They walk toward Caleb's truck.

CALEB

The boys're miss you.

MISS EVERS  
I sure miss them.

CALEB  
Dr. Douglas worried 'bout Willie doin'  
his four foot knee drop. Said it might  
hurt his cartridges.

MISS EVERS  
You mean--

CALEB  
I know. Cartilege. I looked it up. But  
Willie took it for cartridges. Now he  
thinks he got bullets in his knees.

She gets in the truck.

CALEB  
(continuing)  
I hear they're headed up to D.C.

MISS EVERS  
Willie?

CALEB  
Uh Unh, Doctor Douglas, Doctor Brodus.

MISS EVERS  
For what?

CALEB  
(shrugs)  
Can't tell by me. Douglas went up last  
week, Brodus rush off today

MISS EVERS  
(excited)  
To Washington?

They drive off.

INT. GOVERNMENT CAR - WASHINGTON - DAY - 1933

A UNIFORMED DRIVER is chauffeuring Brodus, who has his valise  
on the seat next to him. He is rubbernecking like a tourist  
as the Washington monuments going by.

EXT. FEDERAL BUILDING - DAY - 1933

The car, with the logo of the public health service, pulls up to a government building with a plaque in front saying U.S Public Health Service. Douglas opens the door for Brodus, who stares up at the building as he gets out.

DOUGLAS

Sam! How was your trip?

BRODUS

First the bus, then the train, I don't know which was more excruciating. The ground is still moving.

DOUGLAS

That's the way I felt. So what do you think of Washington?

BRODUS

It's grand.

They go inside, Brodus carrying his valise.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - STAIRCASE - DAY - 1933

Brodus and Douglas have been met by DOCTORS LARKIN, DAVIS, and HAMILTON, who all wear the uniform of the Public Health Service. Larkin and Hamilton are older men, Davis is a young toady. They are all climbing the grand staircase.

LARKIN

We have been most impressed with the work you've been doing at Tuskegee, Dr. Brodus. Davis, take the doctor's bag.

DAVIS

(taking Brodus' valise)

Your syphilis treatment program was a model.

BRODUS

Thank you.

HAMILTON

It's a pity the money dried up.

DAVIS

Not a pity... a shame.

LARKIN

I'd call it a crime. But we may have a solution, a new study... which is why we've asked you up here.

(a smile)

Besides wanting, of course, to meet you in person.

DAVIS

Would you like a cool drink, Dr. Brodus? You've had a long trip. We have some soda in the office here--

BRODUS

Sure, thank you.

HAMILTON

Are you aware of the Oslo experiment, Dr. Brodus?

BRODUS

Oslo? No.

LARKIN

The Venereal Disease Clinic in Oslo, Norway, published a very interesting report. Now, they examined several hundred men with syphilis, and they came up with fascinating data.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - OFFICE - DAY - 1933

Davis goes to a table in the corner and gets the soda. Larkin and the others take their places at a large table and gesture Brodus to sit.

LARKIN

For example, how many men died with neurological impairment as compared to cardiovascular ... fascinating. Doctor. please, sit here.

HAMILTON

Here's the report. Take a look at it yourself. There's an English precis in the back.

Brodus nods and turns the pages, but his concentration is interrupted by Davis.

DAVIS

Coca Cola, Root Beer, Orange Crush,  
Sarsaparilla--?

BRODUS

Whatever--

LARKIN

I believe, Dr. Brodus, that we have in  
Macon County an extraordinary opportunity.

HAMILTON

They studied only white people. We  
believe the Negro people deserve the same  
chance to be studied.

BRODUS

Studied? No, we need money for treatment.

DOUGLAS

We can get money for this. The Federal  
government will pick up the whole tab.  
Not, of course, the 1,400 patients we've  
already been treating, but we can study  
400 men with syphilis, 200 noncontagious  
as a control group. No more depending on  
outsiders.

DAVIS

(hands Brodus a soda)  
Root beer all right?

BRODUS

Fine, thank you.

LARKIN

We need your help. We need Tuskegee.  
(at Brodus' look)  
Now, you seem sceptical.

BRODUS

No... well, maybe a little.

DOUGLAS

Sam, this is for real.

DAVIS

It's important to know whether the Negro  
reacts to syphilis the same way as the  
white man.

BRODUS

Well, suppose that race doesn't make a difference, and that the Negro reacts the same to syphilis as the white man?

LARKIN

Well, we'll want to know that too, wouldn't we? This is science, after all. We want the truth.

DAVIS

Regardless of race, creed or color.

LARKIN

The stamping out of disease ... that's what this office is dedicated to. For all the people, Dr. Brodus. All of them.

BRODUS

(glances down at the report)

You want to repeat the Norwegian study, except with the Negro male.

LARKIN

That's right. Now, we have additional--

But Brodus' eye is caught by something on a page of the report.

BRODUS

(puzzled)

But it says here, Oslo was done between 1891 and 1910. That means there was no treatment then. These men were untreated. They studied untreated men with syphilis.

LARKIN

Yes, that's right.

BRODUS

No treatment? How could we do that?

DAVIS

The only way to get a pure result.

LARKIN

Uncontaminated by drugs and other medicine. That's the beauty of it.

They smile at him, totally sincere. Brodus stares at them.



INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - STAIRCASE - DAY - 1933

Brodus and Douglas are headed back to the grand staircase.

BRODUS

The beauty of it? The beauty of it? I'm a doctor, for God's sake, and so are you. Our patients come before anything else.

DOUGLAS

You don't think I know that, Sam? I've been agonizing over this--

BRODUS

First do no harm!

DOUGLAS

We're not talking forever, here. Six months, maybe a year, to get the facts. Then we let the facts speak for themselves. This study will make medical history. It'll wipe out centuries of ignorance about the mechanism of disease being related to race. If we do this right, I tell you, we will get the money for treatment. Federal money.

BRODUS

Do you really believe that?

DOUGLAS

Sam. This is more than just an opportunity to keep our project alive. Think of it. We will be Federally financed. We'll have momentum. You know what it's like with federal programs, once they get started you can't stop them. And you can build Tuskegee into a major research center and finally prove what Negro nurses and doctors are capable of. Now, think of what good you can do with a program like that!

Brodus considers this.

DOUGLAS

(continuing)

We've already run out of medicine. Our patients aren't being treated, anyway. This study is the only chance we have.

BRODUS

(after a moment)

And the men would be studied the same as at Oslo?

DOUGLAS

Exactly the same. Periodic examinations, X-rays, blood work, we do a spinal tap to check for neurologic syphilis. We give them the works, the very best we have. But this is the only way the results can be pure.

BRODUS

(finally)

And what would the study be called?

DOUGLAS

Exactly what it is. "A Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male".

BRODUS

(shakes his head)

"The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male."

DOUGLAS

Fine. This will bring us back to treatment, Sam, you'll see.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY - 1933

Miss Evers' runs down the hall, dressed in her maid's uniform.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - WARD - DAY - 1933

Miss Evers bursts in. Brodus is bending over a patient, taking a culture. Nurse Betty is beside him.

MISS EVERS

You got the money!

BETTY

(reprovingly)

Shhhh... You know better than to run in the ward.

Doctor Brodus straightens up.

BRODUS  
That's all right, Nurse Parsons.  
(giving her the culture)  
Ask them for the results as quickly as  
possible. Thank you.

Betty takes the culture and leaves. Brodus moves on to  
another patient and Evers follows.

MISS EVERS  
You got the money!

BRODUS  
(nods)  
You can start back to work next week.

MISS EVERS  
Oh, my, oh, my ...  
(admiringly)  
You actually got those white folks to--

BRODUS  
(cutting her off)  
Dr. Douglas will be back from Washington  
next week, so I want you ready to help  
him with whatever he needs.

MISS EVERS  
Doctor, I was born ready.

Brodus stops where they can talk without being overheard.

BRODUS  
Now. About the program--

MISS EVERS  
I can't wait to get started--

BRODUS  
We'll be just studying them.

MISS EVERS  
Well, I've been studying, I know all  
about--

BRODUS  
We've been treating them. We'll just be  
studying them.

She stares at him uncomprehendingly.

MISS EVERS  
No treatment?

BRODUS  
Not for syphilis.

MISS EVERS  
Why?

BRODUS  
Well, the study will bring the money for treatment. In about six months, to a year--

MISS EVERS  
Well, what do we tell the men, what do we do?

BRODUS  
Nothing.

MISS EVERS  
I don't understand. We've been giving them the mercury rubs ... and we just don't do that?

BRODUS  
Well, we'll continue with the rubs. But we'll be using liniment instead of mercury. They won't know the difference. And with the additional money ... we'll give them aspirin, and tonic, and vitamins ... things they've never had before. I guarantee you, they'll feel much, much better.

MISS EVERS  
Until they don't.

BRODUS  
(irritably)  
I don't think you heard me. It won't be forever.

He moves on to the next patient. She keeps at him.

MISS EVERS  
Just six months?

BRODUS  
--or a year.

MISS EVERS  
And they'll be first in line for the  
treatment.

BRODUS  
I promise you.

Betty returns with a hypodermic, which she hands to Brodus, who approaches the patient. His manner is calm and reassuring.

BRODUS  
(continuing)  
All right, young fella ... this is going  
to kill those germs that are making you  
sick. You believe me?  
(the patient is fearful)  
Well, you better believe me. I'm the  
doctor. Right, Nurse Evers?

He talks as he gives the injection, his concentration on the patient.

MISS EVERS  
Yes, doctor.

BRODUS  
And the doctor knows, doesn't he?

MISS EVERS  
Yes, he does.

BRODUS  
And he cares.

MISS EVERS  
Oh, yes.

Brodus finishes the injection and withdraws the needle. He smiles at the patient and pats him.

BRODUS  
So you better believe me when I tell you  
that everything's going to be all right.  
Right, Nurse?

MISS EVERS  
Right, Doctor.

INT. THE EVERS' HOUSE - NIGHT - 1933

Miss Evers sits at a table in her nightdress, writing. Her father enters in his bathrobe.

FATHER

What you doin' up this time of night?

MISS EVERS

Remember that job I got offered in Birmingham... Nurse's Supervisor?

FATHER

That was a whole year ago.

MISS EVERS

I'm writing to see if it's still open.

FATHER

Why you doin' that? You goin' back to work right back here.

MISS EVERS

I don't know I want to.

FATHER

You don't know if you want to? Eunice, what's the matter? What's wrong?

MISS EVERS

It's the new program, Papa... they're not going to treat the men. Not for a while anyway... six months, and then they'll start back, when they get more money.

FATHER

So?

MISS EVERS

They're not going to treat the men, Papa...

FATHER

Six months ain't all that long. Jump down, turn around, six months've been gone. Besides, they the doctors, ain't they? You think you know better than the doctors?

MISS EVERS

This is different.

FATHER

Yes, this is different. You're not goin'  
to be cleanin' them toilets anymore. I  
seen how it's done took all the pride  
right out of you.

MISS EVERS

(an outburst)

There are worse things than cleaning  
toilets, Papa!

FATHER

(steadily)

Eunice, each of us has got to bear his  
burden in the heat of the day. You got  
your burden, I got mine. We do what the  
Lord gives us to do.

He goes back to bed. She sits a moment, then signs what  
she's written. OVER THIS there is the SOUND of wild applause  
and cheering.

EXT. CONTEST BARN - NIGHT - 1933

"Miss Evers' Boys" performing before another appreciative  
audience. Willie dances, the group backs him up; they are  
all ebullient, fed by the audience roaring its approval,  
Willie outdoing himself. Miss Evers watches, happy for them,  
but upset at what is happening.

EXT.- JUKE JOINT - NIGHT - 1933

Miss Evers pulls up and everyone gets out and goes inside.  
There is a boisterous crowd around the joint.

INT. JUKE JOINT - NIGHT - 1933

It is small with an improvised wooden bar and a few tables  
and chairs. Ben, Willie, Hodman and Caleb burst through the  
door with their trophy. Miss Evers follows and is  
uncharacteristically quiet.

WILLIE

We here!

HODMAN

We did it!

BEN

Hey, Caleb, why don't you and Miss Evers have a seat right here. We're gonna go over and get some shine and be right back, all right?

Caleb and Miss Evers sit.

MISS EVERS

I see the joint, but where's the juke?

CALEB

Band's likely takin' a break. It'll hot up in a minute.

(a statement)

I see you got trouble on your mind.

MISS EVERS

You a mind reader, Caleb?

CALEB

Don't take a whole lot of readin' with you. It's written all over your face.

MISS EVERS

(after a moment)

I'm thinking about leaving here.

He doesn't say anything, which exasperates her. The band starts to play.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

Don't you want to know why? Or where? Or when even?

CALEB

I figger you want to tell me, you'll tell me.

MISS EVERS

There's a supervisor job up in Birmingham.

(he nods)

I'm thinking about taking it. It's a step up the ladder for me.

(silence)

Cat got your tongue, Caleb? That ain't your characteristic.

CALEB

It's just that we've done got used to havin' you back with us, you know?



MISS EVERS

I was away for months and you all did just fine.

CALEB

But you was around. We could count on you if need be, knew where to find you. You just don't understand.

MISS EVERS

I do. I do, Caleb. I just... some things you just can't keep on doing, on account of you might get twisted up in your mind.

CALEB

What things?

She just shakes her head. He reaches over and places his hand on hers.

CALEB

(continuing; quietly)

The men gonna drown without you.

She looks down at his hand, unable to tell him what's in her heart.

And then the other three come up carrying cups of liquor which they place on the table and then sit down.

WILLIE

Hey! Tell you what we got. This here is the best shine in the county. If this don't clean out bad blood, nothin' will.

(proposing a toast)

Here's to all of us, we did good tonight, yes sir!

BEN

Miss Evers' Boys!

As they drink, an OLD MAN hits a table with his cane, beating out a new rhythm and chanting.

OLD MAN

Gillee! Damn it, gillee!

Others take up the chant, urging the dancers on.

## OTHERS

Come on ... do it ... take it ... work  
with it, gillee ... come on, gillee,  
gillee!

More dancers take the floor. Willie gets up and joins them solo, doing his stuff. His group joins in the calling out. Even Miss Evers gets caught up. They all pound the table to the beat. The MUSIC RISES, the dancing becomes more frenetic.

Willie takes her hand and pulls her to the dance floor. She lets go to the rhythm and the music and her own repressed feelings. Her hat flies off. She dances with joyous abandon.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE EVERS' HOUSE - NIGHT - 1933

as she slowly tears up the envelope with the letter to Birmingham, we hear...

MISS EVERS (V.O.)

I knew I wasn't goin' anywhere.

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1972

MISS EVERS

I knew that night I would never leave. So we picked out 412 men and started over. This time around, the government gave us all the money we needed.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - DAY - 1933

Brodus and other doctors who came from Washington are listening to Douglas speak. Miss Evers stands to one side, dressed once again in her nurse's uniform.

DOUGLAS

First, we'll do some baseline blood work, to screen out contagion. Only the men with nothing but syphilis will be considered for the study. Then we'll follow up with spinal taps.

BRODUS

There may be a problem there. A lot of men don't know what a spinal tap is and if they think it's not treatment, they won't come.

DOUGLAS

Well, they have to come. We have to make them believe that nothing has changed.

There is a pause; no one has an answer. He looks around.

DOUGLAS

(continuing)

Are there any ideas?

No ideas. He looks at Miss Evers.

DOUGLAS

(continuing)

What about you, Nurse Evers ... you always seem to have the answer.

MISS EVERS

I wouldn't know, Doctor.

DOUGLAS

Well, Nurse Evers, I'm relying on you. If this program is to be a success, we must all put our best foot forward.

Everyone is looking at her.

MISS EVERS

(reluctantly)

Back shots.

DOUGLAS

What's that?

MISS EVERS

Tell them it's back shots. They know about shots, we've given them injections. If we call them back shots, they'll think it's part of the treatment.

DOUGLAS

Okay, so, we'll give them back shots.

They all smile approvingly at Miss Evers as the CAMERA MOVES IN on her face. She forces a smile in return, but she does not feel like smiling. She is part of the lie now.

EXT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY - 1933

A group of men lounge outside, waiting their turn to go in. Among them are Caleb, Ben and Hodman, who plays his mouth organ.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - DAY - 1933

CLOSE on a large needle, the CAMERA PULLING BACK to show it in the gloved hands of Douglas. He wears a surgical gown and mask. The CAMERA FOLLOWS HIM as he goes to where Willie sits on the edge of a table. Holding his hand is Miss Evers, also wearing a mask. The O.S. SOUND of the mouth organ can be heard.

DOUGLAS

I don't want to worry you, Willie. Miss Evers is here to take care of you. It's very important that you don't move, especially once the needle has entered the spinal canal--

WILLIE

My what?

MISS EVERS

It's part of your back. Don't fret.

DOUGLAS

You mustn't move then, because the needle could damage the nerves that go into your legs.

WILLIE

(alarmed)

Oh, no, I can't do it, you see, I need my legs, Miss Evers--

MISS EVERS

I know, Willie--

WILLIE

No, Miss Evers, I need my legs to dance on. I can't do that!

MISS EVERS

That's why it's important that you rest easy now. You be up and hoppin' around in no time, Willie. Lay down. Come on.

DOUGLAS  
It's going to be okay, Willie.

MISS EVERS  
Just don't move. I'm right here with you.  
Relax.

DOUGLAS  
(swabbing his back)  
Just clean this up a little bit.

MISS EVERS  
Listen to the music ... sounds so sweet,  
it must be Hodman.  
(to Douglas)  
You know, Dr. Douglas, we got the best  
harmonica player in the South right here  
in Alabama.

DOUGLAS  
(working)  
You don't say.

MISS EVERS  
Isn't that true?

She gently pushes his head down, but he twists around,  
trying to delay matters.

WILLIE  
Hey! How come that needle's so big? I  
ain't never seen no needle that color,  
Miss Evers.

MISS EVERS  
That's a gold needle. Lay down.

WILLIE  
(impressed)  
Real gold?

MISS EVERS  
Yes!

DOUGLAS  
Real gold, Willie.

MISS EVERS  
Ain't nothin' too good for the colored.  
Don't move, Willie.

DOUGLAS  
It's going to be okay, Willie.

MISS EVERS  
Just don't move. I'm right here with you.  
Relax.

DOUGLAS  
(swabbing his back)  
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(impressed)  
Real gold?

MISS EVERS  
Yes!

DOUGLAS  
Real gold, Willie.

MISS EVERS  
Ain't nothin' too good for the colored.  
Don't move, Willie.

DOUGLAS  
Now take a deep breath.

She presses his head down. Douglas starts inserting the needle, but has a hard time finding the canal. He has to put it in and take it out several times. Each time is painful and Willie cries out.

EXT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY - 1933

The men react to Willie's cries of pain. Hodman stops playing. They look at each other. Some leave.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - DAY - 1933

as Miss Evers tries to comfort Willie. He grits his teeth and tries to get through the pain by chanting.

WILLIE  
(a whisper)  
Go, gillee, gillee, go, gillee ... one  
step, two step, leap turn, spin right--  
(a cry)  
Drop!

EXT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY - 1933

The men react again, very uneasy now. More leave.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - DAY - 1933

as Douglas successfully gets the needle in.

DOUGLAS  
Very important to stay still, Willie.

Another scream.

DOUGLAS  
(continuing; triumphantly)  
All right, we got it!

He pulls out the needle. Willie looks around at Miss Evers, who starts to mop Willie's brow.

MISS EVERS

You did good. Come on, Willie, it's over.  
It's over. You a brave man, Willie  
Johnson. You champ, you. You a real  
champ.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY - 1933

Holding Willie up, she opens the door to admit the next  
patient, calling out as she does.

MISS EVERS

Next!

HER POV

Most of the men are gone. Only Caleb remains.

WILLIE

Guess I scared all away.

CALEB

Guess you gonna have to round 'em all up  
again.

MISS EVERS

Guess I do.

EXT. ROAD BY CEMETERY - DAY - 1933

Miss Evers in her car. Brodus sits next to her. They stop  
for a small funeral procession as it slowly wends its way  
towards a cemetery. Two MEN carry the corpse, which is not  
in a coffin, but a feed bag.

INT. EVERS' CAR - DAY - 1933

Brodus shakes his head.

BRODUS

My granddaddy was a slave and they buried  
him just like that. The slaves are freed,  
and we are still burying them in bags.

(after a moment)

How are we going to bring them back,  
Nurse? I know they're scared, and they  
already have enough pain in their lives.  
But you have to get them to see that it's  
for their own good.



MISS EVERS

Maybe if we trusted them enough to tell them the truth--

BRODUS

We made a decision, a wise decision. Now, they will get treatment. But first we have to get them back and how are we going to do that? Oh, come on, now. You always have good ideas--

MISS EVERS

Sometimes I don't!

POV - the funeral

body being prepared for burial.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

Money.

BRODUS

What about money?

MISS EVERS

Give them each some money ... fifty dollars.

BRODUS

Bribe them back?

MISS EVERS

It's life insurance. So they can be buried in a coffin instead of a feed bag.

BRODUS

(smiling at her)

I can always count on you, can't I?

sits there, not answering. Over this, we hear...

MISS EVERS (V.O.)

The burial money got them back, all right, all but Caleb. I thought sure he was going to move north, like he had said.

and

MISS EVERS

You are.

CALEB

You didn't just tell me that 'cause of somethin' you don't want me to know--

MISS EVERS

(shakes her head)

No, it's not you.

CALEB

(quietly)

Look here, Eunice. We can't keep teasin' like we was still in school, now. You don't want me, I can handle it.

MISS EVERS

I want you, Caleb, you know that. I'm on a different road is all.

CALEB

Ain't no road we can't take together, woman.

MISS EVERS

I can't be with you and have a lie in my heart.

CALEB

What lie?

(she is silent)

Eunice, come on now, tell me what lie--

MISS EVERS

I can't.

CALEB

You can't. That's it, that's all you got to say, you can't?

(he waits; no answer)

You fittin' to throw us away for somethin' you can't even tell me?

MISS EVERS

Caleb, I care about you.

CALEB

No. When you care 'bout somebody, you out in the open with them. Now you call it somethin' else.

MISS EVERS  
I don't know what else to call it.

CALEB  
Sounds like you callin' it goodbye.

MISS EVERS  
I'm sorry.

CALEB  
You sorry? First you can't and now you  
sorry? You sorry 'cause you can't. That's  
all we are to you? Two words?

MISS EVERS  
(in despair)  
I can't tell you any more.

She has no answer. There is a pause, then he takes a long,  
deep breath.

CALEB  
Yeah, well ... I hope what you gettin' is  
better than what you givin' up.

He starts walking back. OVER THIS we hear...

MISS EVERS (V.O.)  
And the years went on ...

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1972

Miss Evers still in the witness chair.

MISS EVERS  
They had said that there would be  
treatment in six months. But the six  
months became a year and the year became  
two and then six and we were just waiting.

CHAIRMAN  
And in all that time, Miss Evers, you  
kept the secret? You never told any of  
the men what was being done to them?

MISS EVERS  
Oh, I wanted to tell them, I surely did,  
I just wanted to tell them straight out.  
(more)

MISS EVERS (cont'd)

"You're not being treated, but you have to stick with it so when the money comes through, you'll be first in line." But they said that the men wouldn't understand and then they'd be lost to the program forever. And none of us wanted that, Senator. So we rubbed them with liniment instead of the mercury, we gave them aspirin and vitamins and everything that, you know... before you know it, how time passes, it was... ten years had passed and the men just hadn't had treatment. But we kept on studying them.

SECOND SENATOR

But Nurse Evers, isn't it true that as early as 1942, penicillin had become widely available as an effective treatment for syphilis? Now, wasn't this made known to you in the Study?

MISS EVERS

Yes, we knew it. But there were other medical concerns, Senator...

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - DAY - 1942

CLOSE on a row of vials containing a yellow powder. A CARD announces "1942." THE ANGLE WIDENS to show her with Brodus and Betty in the nurse's cubicle. Brodus holds up one of the vials.

BRODUS

You mix it with a saline solution and then you give it by injection. Now, tell the men that it stings. Actually, it hurts like hell, so maybe we should just go ahead and tell them the truth.

(dryly, to Miss Evers)

We do that once in a while.

MISS EVERS

It looks like gold.

BRODUS

Well, it's more precious than gold. It saves lives.

(more)

BRODUS (cont'd)  
(to Betty)  
I want to use this for the blood  
poisoning case first, then the pneumonia  
case--

MISS EVERS  
When will our men get it?

BRODUS  
(throws it to Douglas)  
Doctor?

DOUGLAS  
Well, we're still studying that. But with  
syphilis, there are potentially some very  
dangerous side effects...

MISS EVERS  
But they'll get it?

He doesn't answer. Brodus continues to Betty.

BRODUS  
You could mix this with distilled water,  
but I prefer saline solution. Now, there  
are a million units in each vial, which  
means you'll have to work out the dosage  
for each case--

BETTY  
Oh, okay.

BRODUS  
Excuse me.

The CAMERA MOVES IN on Miss Evers. She is troubled.

EXT. CONTEST BARN - DAY - 1942

Another gillee competition. Some men in the audience are in  
ARMY UNIFORMS. Miss Evers and the dance group stand behind  
the stage waiting their turn to go on. Willie is rehearsing.

MISS EVERS  
Where's Caleb? He hasn't been to the  
clinic all week.

BEN  
Oh, you know Caleb. Sometimes he just  
takes off sometimes. He's gonna be here.

HODMAN

He better be. We goin' on soon.

Willie suddenly lets out a cry of pain and sinks to the ground, grabbing his legs.

WILLIE

Ohhh! Oh, oh, man!

BEN

What?...

MISS EVERS

Willie?

HODMAN

What? Willie?

They go to him, Miss Evers alarmed.

BEN

What's wrong with you man?

WILLIE

My legs, man, my legs...

BEN

What's wrong, Willie?

WILLIE

Oh, man. I'm sorry, Miss evers, I didn't mean to holler out like that.

MISS EVERS

You're in pain. It's okay to holler.

WILLIE

Oh, man, Just all of a sudden... my legs just give way on me.

BEN

Come on, Willie, we got to have you.

Willie is fearful as she rolls up his pants.

WILLIE

I'm scared. I'm scared, Miss Evers. I'm losin' it. I'm losin' it. I know I'm losin' it.

HODMAN

Don't say that, Willie, you the star attraction, Willie.

BEN

If you lose it, we all gonna lose it.

WILLIE

It's goin', it's goin'...

HODMAN

No, Willie...

MISS EVERS

Come on, Willie, you can't be thinkin' like that. Let me work on these legs.

She begins to massage his legs.

HODMAN

Now, what you do is, you drink you a quart of May tea. At the beginning of the month. You be just fine. You'll be double fly-steppin' in no time at all. Yes you will.

CALEB (O.C.)

He needs some new doctorin'.

Caleb stands before them, wearing a new Army uniform. The group gapes at him.

HODMAN

What you doin' in that costume?

CALEB

It ain't no costume, it's a uniform.

BEN

You joined the Army.

CALEB

Figgered it's my war just like it is theirs.

(to Miss Evers)

I know what you thinkin', Nurse. You want to know how I got in with bad blood, huh. Got me one of them penicillin shots. Get one of them in you, that Wasserman test don't show nothin' bad. Army couldn't wait to take a fine specimen like me.

HODMAN  
You just gonna get yourself killed.

CALEB  
At least I'll get killed for somethin'.

WILLIE  
Owww!

CALEB  
That's what he needs, one of them  
penicillin shots.

MISS EVERS  
He's getting the best of care.

Inside, the ANNOUNCER calls out.

ANNOUNCER  
And now, from Macon County, Miss Evers'  
Boys!

The SOUND of applause is heard. Willie struggles to his feet.

WILLIE  
That's us!

CALEB  
You hear me, Nurse?

BEN  
What you talkin' to her  
like that for? What's wrong  
with you? Just 'cause you  
got on that uniform?

WILLIE  
I'm all right. I'm all  
right. Miss Evers, you done  
rubbed all the pain right  
out of it. Ain't nuthin'  
standing between me and my  
ticket to the Cotton Club.

WILLIE  
Hey, Caleb, you comin' with us?

CALEB  
That's what I'm here for, Willie.

WILLIE  
Well, all right, let's go!

CALEB  
I'll get my bass fiddle here.

They start for the stage. Miss Evers follows. The group  
begins their performance.



ONSTAGE Willie is dancing, hiding his pain. The audience applauds wildly. Miss Evers watching. Urging him on.

MISS EVERS  
(a whisper)  
Come on, Willie, come on...

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - BRODUS' OFFICE - DAY - 1942

Miss Evers stands before him and Douglas. Her face is set.

MISS EVERS  
They have to have penicillin!

DOUGLAS  
I'm afraid we can't allow that.

MISS EVERS  
Why not? How long do these men have to wait around? First in line, that's what you said... that's what you told me. That was the promise. Now, there's a drug that can help them--

BRODUS  
Penicillin cannot undo the damage that's already been done.

MISS EVERS  
It could keep them from getting worse.

DOUGLAS  
It may also kill them.

MISS EVERS  
Penicillin?

DOUGLAS  
(nods)  
Some chronic syphilitics suffer a fatal allergic reaction to penicillin... it's called the Herxheimer reaction. Now, it's been proven. Washington is doing a study right now to determine the degree of risk.

MISS EVERS  
They're giving it all over the County. Caleb Humphries got it, he's fine. He's in the goddamned Army! Excuse my language.

DOUGLAS

Caleb was lucky. Yes, penicillin is very effective, in a primary and secondary stage. But for those who have entered the tertiary stage, like the men in our study, it cannot cure, and it may also kill! For those men, the study needs to go to the end point.

BRODUS

We already have ten years of data--

DOUGLAS

Ten years is not the end point.

MISS EVERS

What is then?

DOUGLAS

We have to validate our facts. Through autopsy, Nurse Evers. That is the end point. That will make it science, not guesswork.

MISS EVERS

(aghast)

We goin' to wait for them to die?

DOUGLAS

Science is sometimes a hard taskmaster, Nurse Evers. Do you think I like not treating them? No. But we have to finish the Study. We have a chance to make history here!

MISS EVERS

History?

She backs from the room in horror. Douglas looks to Brodus

BRODUS

Let me talk to her.

Brodus goes after Nurse Evers

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY - 1942

Nurse Evers is sitting on a bench, trying to collect herself. Brodus approaches her gently and sits beside her. He is silent for a moment. Then he speaks quietly.

BRODUS

Once, when I was doing my residency back home, up North, I had to do two autopsies at the same time. Two young men, lying next to one another, one white, one colored. And I got the hearts mixed up. I didn't know which went in where. And I remember holding on to those hearts for a long time and examining every detail. And then finally, I just closed my eyes, put a heart in each body and then just sewed them up. That simple.

Nurse Evers looks up at him.

BRODUS

(continuing)

Forget about making history. Think about making change. Change in the way people think. Pushing past the hate, pushing past the idea of difference. We are showing once and for all, through the nobility of scientific proof, that when it comes to disease, ironically, we're all the same.

MISS EVERS

(after a moment)

Doctor Brodus, why do I think that I'm being taken up over the hill?

BRODUS

How's that?

MISS EVERS

That's when somebody says, "you see that hill there? You just got to climb that hill". And when you get up that hill, you see there's another hill beyond, even higher, and then they say "see, that's the top right up there." And so you climb again, and sure enough you get there and there's another hill, and by then you have just come so far you figure you might as well go the rest of the way. That's being taken up over the hill, Dr. Brodus.

BRODUS

You come of your own free will.

MISS EVERS  
I thought I was doing good.

BRODUS  
You are! You are doing good! Don't ever  
let go of that. You are doing good for  
those men and you are doing good for the  
Negro people.

MISS EVERS  
Why can't I look them in the face without  
crying?

BRODUS  
We all want to cry. I mean, but we have  
to be strong. And you are a strong woman,  
and I know that you'll do what you are  
called to do, Miss Evers.

She sits there, crying.

INT. ANOTHER HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - DAY - 1942

Crowded with white and black men waiting their turn. Caleb  
and Willie enter and approach the NURSE at the reception  
desk. Willie is scared.

CALEB  
Come on now, Willie. Excuse me, Nurse.  
We're here to get this man a penicillin  
shot.

NURSE  
Name?

WILLIE  
Willie. Willie Johnson.

The Nurse checks a list pinned to the wall, finds his name.

NURSE  
Can't help you.

WILLIE  
Why not?

NURSE  
Name's on the list.

CALEB  
(intervening)  
What list is that, ma'am?

NURSE  
Tuskegee Study. No penicillin allowed.

Caleb and Willie are shocked. Caleb takes Willie's arm.

WILLIE  
How come I can't get a shot like Caleb  
got a shot? I want... I mean, I come--

CALEB  
Never mind, Willie. Come on. We'll just  
go somewhere's else.

They turn and go. The Nurse calls after them.

NURSE  
Won't help. They sent the list to  
everybody.

WILLIE  
(as they leave)  
They won't give me no shot?

CALEB  
Don't worry about it now, we're gonna go  
down here, I'm gonna take you down here...

EXT. ANOTHER HOSPITAL - DAY - 1942

Caleb and Willie emerge from the hospital.

WILLIE  
I mean, I ain't never done nothin' to  
nobody, but you got--

CALEB  
Yeah, I'm gonna carry you over there now,  
gonna make sure they do what they  
supposed to do.

Miss Evers roars up in her car and calls.

MISS EVERS  
Willie! What you doin'?

WILLIE

Miss Evers, they don't want to give me the penicillin in here. Caleb's gonna take me to a place where I can get it. They say I'm on some kind of list.

MISS EVERS

Oh, Willie, that shot could've killed you--

CALEB

I'm still standin'.

MISS EVERS

'Cause you just lucky. Penicillin could be dangerous for him--

Willie and Caleb get in his truck.

CALEB

Why him and not me?

MISS EVERS

You're different.

CALEB

Why?

MISS EVERS

I don't know! Nobody knows! But we can't take that chance. Listen to me, Willie!

WILLIE

Yeah?

MISS EVERS

It could have exploded your heart!

WILLIE

What? Caleb, You ain't said nothin' about my heart...

MISS EVERS

He don't know. I know.

She takes Willie's arm. He looks at Caleb, torn.

CALEB

You go ahead on with her, Willie.

WILLIE

Caleb, you said you was gonna take me to get--

CALEB

Never mind about what I said now, you get on with her.

MISS EVERS

Willie, it's for your own good.

Willie gets out of the truck.

CALEB

She's gonna see to it you don't get it noway.

MISS EVERS

Oh, Caleb.

CALEB

(dryly)

Yeah, I know, the doctors know best.

He starts the truck.

CALEB

(continuing)

Boy, they got a good one when they found you, nurse. I got a train to catch anyhow.

MISS EVERS

Don't get yourself shot.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

Lucky they let me near a gun. Hey Willie?

WILLIE

Yeah?

CALEB

You dance 'em down, you hear?

He drives away. Willie raises his hand in farewell. Miss Evers watches Caleb go.

WILLIE

(calls)

'Bye, Caleb. He's a good man, Miss Evers.

MISS EVERS  
(heartbroken)  
Yes, he is.

They go to get into her car.

WILLIE  
Hey, Miss Evers. Ben is feeling poorly.

MISS EVERS  
I know.

WILLIE  
He got trouble with his eyes and his legs  
too. Now that only leaves me and Hodman  
for the gilleein'.  
(another pause)  
Hey, Miss Evers ...

MISS EVERS  
Huh?

WILLIE  
You think I'm still goin' to make it to  
the Cotton Club?

MISS EVERS  
(nods)  
I'm gettin' me a new hat and sittin'  
right up on the front row.

WILLIE  
You tellin' me straight?

MISS EVERS  
I'm goin' to see you through this,  
Willie. You hear me? I ain't left you  
yet and I'm not leavin' you now. We goin'  
to see this through together.

She gets in the car with him and starts it.

WILLIE  
You know, I been thinkin'. You know about  
the Cotton Club...

MISS EVERS  
Know what?

WILLIE  
They don't allow no colored in the  
audience. Only on the stage.



MISS EVERS

Well, I'll just get me a chair and sit up there on the stage.

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1972

MISS EVERS

I had heard that Caleb had been sent overseas, but a long time went by with no word from him, so I started to think that he had gotten himself killed. Meanwhile, I did my best, but the men got steadily worse. The disease took their bodies and their minds. Hodman started thinking he could cure himself...

EXT. FIELD NEAR HODMAN'S - DAY - 1942

CLOSE on Hodman squatting over a small fire and looking intently into the smoke. Miss Evers is coming towards him.

HODMAN

(chanting)

Hey naa, hey naa, we gonna do this well... Hey naa, hey naa, we gonna do this well...

MISS EVERS

Hodman--

HODMAN

Hey naa, hey naa, we gonna do this well...

MISS EVERS

Hodman!

He looks up at her, smiling.

HODMAN

Hey, there. What you doin' out here, Miss Evers?

MISS EVERS

Lookin' for you. Where's your family?

HODMAN

They gone to my mama's. They say I ain't no good for 'em like this.

MISS EVERS

You need to come in for your treatment.  
You and them friends of yours.

HODMAN

No. I gots my own treatment right here,  
Miss Evers. See? You just burn these  
spider webs and look hard into the smoke.  
It's good for the eyesight, too.

MISS EVERS

That sounds fine to me. But it seems like  
it'd be twice as powerful if you do that  
and the treatment. They'll work together.  
Like feedin' one another.

HODMAN

You think so?

MISS EVERS

I know so.

HODMAN

(impressed)  
Twice as powerful.

MISS EVERS

(nods)  
Come on. Come on back with me now. You  
been blowin' enough smoke for today.

He gets to his feet and they start back towards her parked  
car. Over this we hear..

MISS EVERS (V.O.)

Bad as Hodman was, Ben was the first to  
fall...

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - WARD - NIGHT - 1944

Miss Evers walks to where Ben lies in bed. She carries a  
document in her hand. A nurse sits beside Ben, holding his  
hand. He is close to death. She looks up at Miss Evers and  
indicates there is no hope, then moves away to let Miss  
Evers approach the bed.

MISS EVERS

Hello, Ben.

BEN  
(peering at her)  
Miss Evers?

MISS EVERS  
(cheerfully)  
Now don't tell me you don't recognize an  
old girl friend. How you doin'?

BEN  
I guess I'm dyin', Miss Evers, the way  
these people all tiptoein' all around me  
all the time.

MISS EVERS  
You ain't dead yet, Ben. You a tough  
customer.

BEN  
I just feel all wore down all the time,  
Miss Evers.

MISS EVERS  
Well, I got somethin' to raise you right  
up.

She hands him the document along with some paper currency.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
It's from the United States government.

BEN  
It's for me?

MISS EVERS  
Hm hmm. For you and all the other men. It  
is a Certificate of Appreciation. And  
ten whole dollars, a dollar for every  
year you been in the program.

BEN  
They payin' us for havin' the bad blood?

MISS EVERS  
They showin' appreciation for what you  
boys done.

BEN  
I ain't done nothin', Miss Evers, 'cept  
get sick.  
(more)

BEN (cont'd)  
(strokes the bills)  
You know, I ain't had this much cash  
money since we got that fifty dollars for  
the burial.

He takes a difficult breath.

BEN  
(continuing)  
I'm goin' blind, too. Ain't that a treat.  
Ain't nothin' more you can do for me, is  
there?

MISS EVERS  
We're tryin' everything we can--

BEN  
I know you are.

MISS EVERS  
There ain't a day that goes by--

BEN  
We all know, Miss Evers. Hey, you see,  
you didn't make us sick and you done all  
that you can to make us well. Can't do no  
more than that, Miss Evers.

MISS EVERS  
You gonna be okay, Ben.

BEN  
No, no I ain't Miss Evers. But I  
appreciate you sayin' that. Miss Evers.  
You wait 'til you see that coffin old Ben  
done picked out for hisself. It's red,  
it's blue, it's green, it's yellow...  
It's a doozie, Miss Evers. You gonna be  
real proud.  
(he is failing)  
You gonna be so proud.

She nods. Her heart is breaking.

EXT. THE EVERS' HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT - 1944

She is savagely CHOPPING wood, taking out her frustrations,  
as her Father comes to the window.

FATHER

What are you doin' now?

MISS EVERS

What do I look like I'm doing?

FATHER

Do you know what time it is?

(she just grunts)

You keepin' me awake with all that  
choppin'.

MISS EVERS

You always say you can't sleep, anyway.

FATHER

Well, tonight I was sleepin'. Sleepin'  
good.

He watches as she continues to split the wood.

FATHER

(continuing)

Eunice ...

(another blow)

If you mad about somethin', don't take it  
out on the wood. Go after what you're mad  
about.

MISS EVERS

Ben's dead, Papa. Hodman's going insane.  
I'm mad at the world.

FATHER

Well, you ain't goin' to fix it choppin'  
wood. All you goin' to do is keep me up  
all night.

MISS EVERS

Suppose there's nothing else you can do?

FATHER

If you believed that, you'd never become  
a nurse in the first place. I'm gonna get  
me some milk. You want some?

MISS EVERS

(shakes her head)

Be sure to warm it.

He goes back into the house. She stands with the ax in her  
hand, thinking about what he had said.

Then she comes to a decision, raises the axe high and buries it deep in a block of wood. She turns and runs determinedly into house.

EXT. THE EVERS' HOUSE - NIGHT - 1944

Her car drives off with a screech of tires. Her father comes out on the porch, a glass of milk in his hand, and looks after her.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - WARD - NIGHT - 1944

Miss Evers stands behind the door leading into the ward. She is looking through the door window. The ward is dark, the patients asleep. Only the nurse's station is lit. A Nurse can be seen preparing a tray of medicines. She leaves the station and starts through the ward, awakening different patients to give them their medicine.

Miss Evers opens the door noiselessly and slips into the ward. She moves silently into the nurse's station, opens a drawer and takes out a set of keys. With a key, she opens a cabinet and searches until she finds what she is looking for: the yellow vials of penicillin. She takes a few vials, closes and locks the cabinet.

EXT. HODMAN'S SHACK - NIGHT - 1944

as Miss Evers drives up and gets out of her car. She carries a small bag. She runs into the house.

INT. HODMAN'S SHACK - NIGHT - 1944

as Miss Evers comes in. Hodman sits at a table, trying to open a tin can with a skull and crossbones on it.

MISS EVERS  
Hello, Hodman.

He grunts, intent on what he's doing.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
What you got there? Turpentine?  
(examines the can)  
You fixin' to peel the paint off  
somethin'?

HODMAN  
I'm makin' me some new medicine.

MISS EVERS  
Yeah, I hear turps is good for moles, but  
I got somethin' new.

She opens the bag and takes out a vial.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
Penicillin.

HODMAN  
For me?  
(she nods)  
Thought you didn't want us takin' that  
stuff?

MISS EVERS  
Well, I think you need it now, Hodman. I  
do think you need it.

HODMAN  
Why?

MISS EVERS  
Them haints you been seein'. I don't want  
them botherin' you.

HODMAN  
You think they ain't there.

MISS EVERS  
I think you need penicillin.  
(gently)  
But I got to warn you ... you could have  
a bad reaction. Chances are you won't,  
but you got to know that goin' in.

HODMAN  
You think I should do it?

MISS EVERS  
As long as you know what you're doin'.  
(he nods)  
You know what you doin', Hodman?  
(another nod)  
You understand what I'm sayin'?

HODMAN  
Yeah, yeah. How bad? That bad reaction?

MISS EVERS

It's bad enough. But now I'm goin' to stay right here with you. You okay after twelve hours, you free and clear.

HODMAN

(a decision)

All right, just tell me what I got to do.

INT. HODMAN'S SHACK - DAWN - 1944

Miss Evers dozes in a rocking chair. She stirs, comes awake, looks around. No one else is there.

MISS EVERS

Hodman? Hopdman?

EXT. FIELD NEAR HODMAN'S - DAWN - 1944

as Miss Evers runs through, calling out.

MISS EVERS

Hodman?

She sees him at his fire. He is on his hands and knees, scraping up dirt and putting it into the now-opened can of turpentine. Hodman turns his face to the sky.

HODMAN

(chants)

"New moon new, first time I seen you--"

He holds the can up to the moon and calls out in a SOUND that's part bird call and part baby's cry.

HODMAN

(continuing)

Kaaaaaaaaaaaa!!

He lifts the can to his mouth. She screams.

MISS EVERS

(running to him)

No Hodman! Don't drink that! That's poison!

He drinks heavily from the can. She reaches his side and knocks the can away, then pulls him up.



MISS EVERS  
 (continuing)  
 No, Hodman! Come on! Come on! Oh God!  
 Come on!

HODMAN  
 Good medicine, Miss Evers. Haints all  
 gone now. Baby's skipped on home. I told  
 you.

She lifts him and tries to carry him. He clutches his  
 stomach in sudden, terrible pain.

MISS EVERS  
 Come on, Hodman, come on, stand up! Come  
 on, stand up! Come on!

HODMAN  
 Ahhhhh!!!

MISS EVERS  
 Come on, come on, Hodman! Oh, my God!

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT - 1944

Hodman is on a gurney as an ATTENDANT and a frantic Miss  
 Evers race down the hallway.

MISS EVERS  
 We'll get us some help. Hang on, hang  
 on...

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - NIGHT - 1944

Hodman lies on the examining table as Brodus pulls a sheet  
 over his face. He is dead. Brodus turns away and looks at  
 Miss Evers standing by the foot of the table.

MISS EVERS  
 I killed him.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - MORGUE - DAWN - 1944

Hodman's body lies on a slab. Brodus has just finished the  
 autopsy. Miss Evers watches from across the room. He comes  
 towards her, peeling off his gloves.

BRODUS

What you might expect. He died from swallowing thirty-two ounces of turpentine. But there were certain other elements consistent with the Herxheimer reaction.

MISS EVERS

What other elements?

BRODUS

Nothing to prove out for sure--

MISS EVERS

But penicillin could have killed him?

BRODUS

Well, there's no real proof, just an indication. Officially, I'm calling it death by self-inflicted poisoning.

(she is silent)

But you know what you did? Stealing medicine, you could go to jail for that. Giving that man that injection violated the protocol of the Study. It could have disgraced the Institute.

MISS EVERS

I wasn't thinking of the Study.

BRODUS

Well, I have to, Nurse Evers. I know that there are people just waiting out there for us to fail. Hoping that we will fail. So they can keep saying that Negroes are stupid, incompetent, good for nothing, inferior...

(shakes his head)

But I'm willing to forget what you did. The man was in a state of dementia, it was just a matter of time... You are their nurse, Miss Evers.

MISS EVERS

Doctor, we're sacrificing them for something I can't even stand up for.

BRODUS

(exploding)

Yes! Yes we are! For reasons they will never understand.

(more)

BRODUS (cont'd)

For reasons that are greater than any one of them: the greater good for the race!

MISS EVERS

I am not going up over that next hill!

BRODUS

Oh, yeah, where you going to go? They won't just let us go where it is nice and flat. It's all hills for us. We either climb or we stay at the bottom. That's the only choice they give us! Now you knew that when you became part of the program. Now, if you want to leave, that's your privilege. But the men will miss you.

He turns away from her and goes out another door. She stands there. Her voice is heard again...

MISS EVERS

(V.O.)

I stayed. I didn't back out. I went up over that next hill and sure enough there was another hill after that. And another.

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - 1972

MISS EVERS

You see Senator, they still needed my help. I couldn't save them but there were things I could do for them. Things that I owed them. Simple comforts, like knowing that somebody cared. The war ended and we went right on taking care of them. Lying, yes, but taking care.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - CLINIC - DAY - 1945

The men are doing their back rubs. Willie comes in from having been examined by Dr. Douglas.

WILLIE

Hey, Miss Evers! Come on, Doc, tell her where you been.

(to Miss Evers)

You know where he been?

MISS EVERS

I know he's been up North.

WILLIE

He been back to the Cotton Club!

MEN

The Cotton Club?!

DOUGLAS

(nods)

I had to go to a meeting in New York, so  
I thought I'd stop and get Old Willie a  
report.

WILLIE

Say he saw Ruby Blue!

MEN

Ruby Blue!

WILLIE

Said he was scatterin' and leapin' and  
doin' the stair dance.

(he demonstrates)

Ain't that right, Doc? Like that?

DOUGLAS

Well, sort of--

WILLIE

What you mean sort of? What was he doin'  
that was different?

DOUGLAS

Well, he was movin' both feet in  
different rhythms at the same time. Kind  
of like this.

Douglas tries a demonstration. Everyone laughs, including  
Douglas.

WILLIE

So he like two different people dancin'  
on the same legs?

DOUGLAS

Yeah.

WILLIE

Man, that's nice. That's new. Hey, I can use that. Where we got stairs around here? I know! Excuse me, Doc.

He goes out into the hall.

MISS EVERS

That was nice of you. But he shouldn't be doin' stairs. He's going to hurt himself.

She goes out. Douglas stands for a moment and then goes out to where Willie exited.

INT. TUSKEGEE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY - 1945

Willie is on the stairs, attempting the dance step, repeating the rhythm to himself.

WILLIE

Da, da, da, da, da.

He trips, catches himself on the banister, smiles again at Douglas.

DOUGLAS

Willie...

WILLIE

I'm all right, Doc. I'm all right, I'm all right.

He starts again, indomitable. Douglas watches him until he falls again. Douglas rushes to him and helps him up.

DOUGLAS

You all right?

WILLIE

I just need a little time, Doc, I just need a little time. I'll get it, you know.

DOUGLAS

I understand. Just take a little rest now.

They go back toward the clinic together.

WILLIE

Hey, Doc, what'd you say? Now he was dancin' on different rhythms, on different legs at the same time?

DOUGLAS  
That's right. You just about had it there.

WILLIE  
Oh, come on, Doc, I ain't had it like that. But you know, you didn't dance too bad.

DOUGLAS  
Oh, go on.

WILLIE  
Hey, let me see you cut a step. Go on, cut one. Go ahead.

Douglas attempts the step. Willie bursts out laughing.

DOUGLAS  
How was I?

WILLIE  
You're a better doctor than you are a dancer.

Laughing, arm in arm, they move away down the hall.

EXT. THE EVERS' HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY - 1945

She is taking down wash from a clothesline and putting it into a basket when she looks up to see Caleb standing there. He is in Army uniform, but this time there are decorations on it. She stops what she is doing.

CALEB  
You need some new tires on your car.

MISS EVERS  
There's a war on.

CALEB  
Yeah, I heard.

There is a pause. neither quite knows what to say. She points to the ribbons on his chest.

MISS EVERS  
I see you got yourself some medals.

CALEB

Well, they ain't really medals. Just tell where I been ... Africa, Sicily, Italy. You know, they got colored folks in Africa?

MISS EVERS

You joshing me.

CALEB

No, colored all over.

They smile at each other.

CALEB

(continuing)

You lookin' good, Eunice.

MISS EVERS

You look good too, Caleb. You back here for good now?

CALEB

(shakes his head)

No. Corina's kids grown up enough to look after the place their own self now.

MISS EVERS

You just came back to see 'em?

CALEB

I come back for you.

There is a pause. She doesn't know how to respond to this, so she resumes hanging the wash instead. He follows her.

CALEB

(continuing)

You know, most folks think that the war is fightin' and shootin' and carryin' on. It really ain't nothin' but a whole bunch of sittin' around and waitin'. I did a whole lot of thinkin' while I was over there.

MISS EVERS

(trying for lightness)

They say thinking's good for the soul.

CALEB

I thought a lot about you and me, and how we messed it up. How I let you get away.

MISS EVERS

You didn't let me. I did it.

CALEB

It was a mistake, is what it was.

MISS EVERS

(smiles)

Well, we all make mistakes.

He takes her arm and turns her to face him.

CALEB

Come on, now, Eunice, don't go skatin'  
around on me. Listen. I don't want us to  
make the same mistake again.

MISS EVERS

Caleb, we haven't seen each other for  
five years. I haven't heard from you in  
five years.

She takes the laundry and moves up onto the back porch. He  
follows her.

CALEB

I'm back now, that's all that counts. I  
got a job up north ... soon's I get  
discharged. Steel makin' plant outside  
Chicago, platoon buddy of mine got me in  
the union. They got hospitals all around  
Chicago, you could get a job, they always  
need nurses. We could have a real nice  
life.

MISS EVERS

Give me a minute here.

(takes a deep breath)

I'll say one thing for you, Caleb  
Humphries. You sure know how to lay it on  
a girl. Here, feel this...

His hand has reached up to take hers and she moves it now to  
her chest.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

I got the palpitations ...

CALEB

(concerned)

You want to sit down?



She shakes her head. They are suddenly aware that they are touching. He starts to move his hand towards her breast. The mutual attraction is still there.

For a moment, he caresses her breast, but then she moves his hand away.

MISS EVERS

I can't.

CALEB

What, you can't? You still sayin' that to me?

MISS EVERS

I can't leave here. You could stay...

CALEB

No I can't. Not even for you. My life here is over, Eunice. I got to go somewhere where I got a chance now. And I want you to come with me.

She turns away, torn. He persists.

CALEB

(continuing)

How long's it been now? Ten, twelve years?

(she shakes her head)

You done all you could, Eunice. Nobody could do more than what you done. You been there for them day and night.

MISS EVERS

The program's not finished--

CALEB

Well, what more can you do?

MISS EVERS

I can be here for them--

CALEB

And watch them die, is that it? Hold their hands 'til they go blind, crippled, or crazy... put on your hat for funerals--

MISS EVERS

Remember what you said once? You said that the men would drown without me--

CALEB  
They dyin' with you.

She tries to turn away, but he holds her.

CALEB  
(continuing)  
They ain't no more "Miss Evers Boys."  
"Miss Evers Boys" is through. Ain't  
nothin' holdin' you here, woman.

MISS EVERS  
You just don't know what it's like--

CALEB  
What I got to know? I know I want you  
with me. I know you want to be with me.  
Known it all these years. Eunice, we been  
foolish to stay apart.

He pulls her towards him.

MISS EVERS  
(as he touches her)  
No...

CALEB  
Why, 'cause your daddy's lookin'? All  
he's gonna see is that his little girl's  
a grown woman.

He kisses her. She tries to struggle free, but he persists  
until she responds, kissing him passionately, then pushing  
him fiercely away. She moves away and resumes her laundry  
work.

MISS EVERS  
What did you prove, Caleb?

CALEB  
That you want me.

MISS EVERS  
But I have always wanted you!

CALEB  
Then come north with me and let's make a  
life together.

MISS EVERS  
I can't. I owe them, Caleb.

CALEB  
You paid already. You don't owe--

MISS EVERS  
(from her soul)  
No! I could never pay them enough.

Caleb is struck by the depth of her pain. There is a pause.  
He looks at her, coming to understanding.

CALEB  
(after a long pause)  
We missed somethin' real good, didn't we.

She nods. Another pause.

CALEB  
(continuing)  
All right... best go see what time my  
train is leavin'.

He turns to go. She stops him.

MISS EVERS  
Caleb. I am so happy you didn't get  
yourself killed.

CALEB  
Me too.

He stops in the door.

CALEB  
(continuing; quietly)  
How come we didn't get it, Eunice ...  
the penicillin?

MISS EVERS  
(the painful litany)  
You were part of a government study.

CALEB  
That ain't no answer.

She knows it isn't, but can't afford to admit it, not to  
him, not to herself.

MISS EVERS  
The Study was the proof that the doctors  
needed that... the doctors are  
dedicated... and they know what's best.

CALEB  
(slowly, deeply)  
Best was penicillin.

He turns and leaves. She looks after him, clutches herself in pain, then draws herself up and turns to her laundry.

Her father opens the door.

FATHER  
Go after him, Eunice. Go on.

She does not look at him, concentrating on the iron.

FATHER  
(continuing)  
What are you hangin' around here for?  
Takin' care of an old man is no life for  
you. You're still a young woman. And  
don't tell me you're staying back here  
because you're a nurse. They have nursin'  
up north, too.

She takes out the ironing board.

FATHER  
(continuing)  
You got a chance here, Eunice. He's a  
good man - all those medals on his  
chest - And you're still soft for him. I  
could see it. I could--

MISS EVERS  
(not looking at him)  
Leave me alone, Papa.

FATHER  
I ain't left you alone since you was a  
baby. How you expect me to start now?  
You got a lot of life left, Eunice. Don't  
let it all get away.

MISS EVERS  
I can't, Papa...

FATHER  
You can if you will.

MISS EVERS  
I can't. I can't, I can not.  
(in great pain)  
You always tell me to do what's right,  
don't you? Well, what I'm doing is right.  
It's... it's got to be right, Papa!

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1972

Miss Evers is still on the stand.

MISS EVERS  
It was right, it had to be right.

Brodus flinches.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
The men kept dying, but then, they would  
have died anyway, wouldn't they? I  
prepared a report every Spring on the  
number of them remaining. Four hundred  
and twelve in 1946. Three hundred and  
sixty, ten years later...

Brodus drops his eyes.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
And then, last year, when the papers got  
ahold to the story, it was a hundred and  
twenty-seven left.

The crowd reacts in shock.

MISS EVERS  
(continuing)  
Of the four hundred and twelve that we  
started with, one hundred and twenty-  
seven was left. Of Miss Evers' Boys, it  
was just two... just Willie, and...  
Caleb...

EXT. STEEL MILL - DAY - 1972

Caleb sits in his work clothes, eating his lunch and looking  
at a newspaper.

MISS EVERS (V.O.)

I had heard that he got that job up north... He never married.

Caleb's headline says a Senate hearing on the experiment is underway. It triggers a flood of memories behind his eyes.

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY - 1972

Miss Evers is continuing her testimony.

MISS EVERS

So that brings us to Washington, DC. I guess none of us ended up where we thought we would.

CHAIRMAN

(after a pause)

I simply don't understand, Miss Evers. Much as we may appreciate your personal sacrifice, the fact remains that patients with a potentially fatal disease went untreated when treatment was available.

MISS EVERS

It was for the greater good--

SECOND SENATOR

(sharply)

Who's good, Miss Evers? Who has benefited?

MISS EVERS

We proved that there's no difference between how blacks and whites respond to syphilis. The benefit of that--

CHAIRMAN

If they were white, Miss Evers, if they were white, would these men have been treated as they were? You should know better than anyone--

MISS EVERS

(exploding)

Yes, I do Senator! If they had been white, your Public Health Service would never have agreed to do this study in the first place. They wouldn't've dared!

(more)

MISS EVERS (cont'd)

If they had been white, you congressmen would'vent have voted every year for forty years! If they had been white, somebody would have said somethin' before now, because everybody knew what was goin' on, it wasn't no secret. But because they were black, nobody cared! Because they were black, you, the U.S. government, thought that they were expendable. Now you're trying to push the blame off on me and the fine doctors who did the best we could with the choice you gave us to make--

Brodus flinches.

MISS EVERS

(continuing)

--Whether to leave those men in neglect, or to give them the best care that was within our power to give. Nursin' them men was my life, Mister!

CHAIRMAN

(trying to make peace)

We're not trying to blame you, Miss Evers.  
(looking kindly at her)  
We understand you were acting under orders. Orders from Dr. Brodus and the others.

Brodus reacts with real pain. She collects herself.

MISS EVERS

I went up that hill on my own. I can carry the weight of the burden by myself.

SECOND SENATOR

But Miss Evers, what in the world did you think you were doing?

MISS EVERS

(draws herself up)

Honorin' my oath as a nurse, Senator. I loved those men. They were susceptible to kindness, and I gave them all that I had.

Tears stream down her face. Very slowly, we...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY - 1972

Miss Evers and Willie are at the graves of Hodman and Ben. Miss Evers is kneeling between the graves, having changed the flowers. Willie has paresis, the final stage of syphilis. He is nearly blind, his movements uncoordinated and his speech slurred. But he shuffles in a feeble parody of his dance steps, whispering to himself as he does.

WILLIE

Oh gillee gillee, oh gillee gillee, oh  
gillee gillee, oh gillee...

MISS EVERS

Oh, you sure could dance. Your feet went  
faster than the music.

Miss Evers rises.

WILLIE

Gillee, gillee...

As he dances, he loses his balance a moment. She reaches out to steady him.

MISS EVERS

Come on, Willie. Go home. Dancin's over..

She pats the headstones and leads him away. He is still smiling, mumbling his song.

WILLIE

Here I do my dance, on the stairs, just  
like Ruby Blue...

After a time, cards appear:

CARD

The Senate Sub-committee declared the  
Tuskegee Study "outrageous and  
intolerable." Reform of national policies  
on human experimentation soon followed.

The Public Health Service quickly offered  
all survivors penicillin and free medical  
treatment for life. In 1974, a lawsuit  
awarded \$37,500 to each survivor, and  
\$15,000 to the heirs of "deceased  
syphilitics."



Despite official warnings that penicillin might prove harmful, not a single adverse reaction was reported among the many survivors who finally received treatment.

FADE OUT:

Over black, a final card:

No one connected with the Study was ever charged or disciplined. The debate over human experimentation in America continues today.

END CREDITS ROLL